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# MAUDE TALBOT.

BY

HOLME LEE.



IN THREE VOLUMES.

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## CHAPTER I.

### THE ORIEL CHAMBER AT OLD COURT.

A GREAT North of England Town. A low quarter, abandoned almost exclusively to the poorer artisans, and those nondescript characters who are the dregs of every manufacturing population. A dense labyrinth of narrow, filthy streets; huge red-brick factories; giant chimneys overlooking all, blackening all with smoke. The rain coming down with a wiry pertinacity that refuses to be entreated; the sky low, leaden-hued; the wind making sudden rushes round sharp corners, and, finding no thoroughfare, howling at its baffled efforts to escape from the hundred and one blind alleys in which it has lost itself; whistling and swirling amongst crooked tumble-down chim-

neys ; invading the privacy of dark foul garrets through half open traps ; shouting loud nothings to the daws in the crazed tower of St Grim ; admonishing those who have firesides to seek them speedily ; and suggesting to those who have none, thoughts of the comparative ease and comfort of those narrow homes under the church walls, which men, be they never so mean, never so hard of heart, are not apt to begrudge each other.

Saturday afternoon. The clock on the stroke of four. The streets are almost empty. Here and there a group of adventurous children, revelling in the mud, unsuspecting of irate mothers about to swoop down amongst them ; a masterless cur or two, wet and blear-eyed, almost savage with hunger and persecution. St Grim's clock is a rigid time-marker.

One, two, three, four.

Spite of wind, spite of rain, the lanes and streets and alleys, are all alive now. Pouring out from the factory gates come crowds of men, women, girls. The rude jostlings, the foul abuse, the often and unprovoked oath, the

diseased frames, the discontented faces, the angered hearts and warped minds, are all there. Policy does not counsel concealment amongst these untaught human beings. The naked hideousness of brazened vice stands out palpable ; challenging rebuke, but receiving none. They have their week's wages. Some go to their poverty-smitten homes : amongst the men, few. There are flaring taverns at every street corner, which seem to drive a flourishing trade from the groups who press within their doors. Women too, and girls : girls of fourteen, with gaudy handkerchiefs over their hair, and countenances morally and physically hardened. Not all such, however. Some go their way silently to the wretched homes which they share with many others like themselves.

In half an hour or so the wind has the streets to itself again ; an occasional click of pattens on the wet flags, announcing the transit of some marketing mother of a family from " the shop " to her expectant flock, is the only sound that breaks the incessant drop, drop of the rain in the streaming gutter. Twilight is



clouding over, and the wind rises higher with the night ; how bitter cold it is.

There is a solitary woman breasting her way resolutely against the blast ; her cloak wrapped tightly round her shoulders, her umbrella up and held steadily ; neither rain nor storm seem to have much effect on her, though she does not disdain the partial shelter afforded by a huge, dead stone wall. Just as St Grim's clock strikes five, she stops at a low postern gate sunk in the wall ; inserts a key into the lock, a sturdy turn, a push, and she stands within a great flagged court-yard. It is quite another country from that beyond the gate. In the uncertain light, it looks a strange ghostly place. There are two rows of bare trees, waving their branches wildly against the sky, and creaking dismally in the blast as it goes shrieking about their tops, as if they were afraid their hour was come : as well they may be, for there is scarce a living tree within miles of them, and how they have survived so long is little short of a miracle. The background is a huge pile of masonry, seeming huger in the misty twilight. Very lofty and

very irregular ; wonderful stacks of chimneys ; quaint windows, peering out of the roof like eyes ; oddly fashioned gables ; projecting upper stories ; doors in unexpected places ; windows of all forms and all sizes ; an oriel about the centre, shewing by its red glow that there is a bright fire within ; under it a vast heavy door, with a great flight of steps worn hollow in the middle by the foot-steps of comers and goers, not of the present day, but of past times, when Old Court was a favoured residence of the Earls Talbot ; before they, in their munificence, when they found it no longer a fit habitation for themselves, scantily endowed it as a refuge for forty destitute gentlewomen.

Time was, no longer than eighty years ago, when fields and waving woods were round Old Court, instead of swarming hives of human industry. But those things lived only in tradition, or the memory of the oldest inhabitant ; though the building itself held its ground, an abode of unimpeachable respectability : in the mob, but not of it ; as distinct in all its belongings and associations from its modern neighbours, as were these flaring red-

brick structures, from its weather-stained walls and ivy-wreathed gables.

Within its wide court-yard is a more dreary seclusion than would easily be found amongst the wilds of nature: in most respects it is a suitable house for those human relics of decayed gentility who find a retreat, there to end their pilgrimage.

Everything about it has the stamp of a past age; from the mutilated griffins peering down from the pillars of the entrance, to the moss-grown flags beyond the avenue. It is also highly suggestive of the independent and conflicting tastes of its various possessors. The main body of the building is Tudor, but an anglo-corinthian portico juts out beneath an oriel window; and a wing after the Italian manner is curiously dove-tailed into the original edifice at one extremity, whilst an unpretending addition in brick and mortar balances it at the other. The thick ivy partially conceals these discrepancies, and when the sun does make its way down into Old Court yard, there is a quaint, monastic repose about its look, very refreshing after the tur-

moil and hubbub incessantly surging without its walls. But in the October twilight, it has an unmitigated scowl of ghostliness and decay, by no means pleasant to contemplate.

Some such thought as this hastens the woman's steps up to the door. Heavy as it looks, it is not difficult to open : a single turn of the key and the wind does the rest : and darting in after her, makes a hasty inspection of all the remote corners, and then rushes back, hoping to escape out into the night again ; but finding the door shut, it abandons it for mysterious corridors, and interminable staircases, and abyss-like chimneys. The hall is not quite in darkness, but nearly so : a little oil-lamp stands on a bracket by the empty fire-place, and another in a corner of the first great landing-place ; the feeble lights flicker in the eddyng gusts and cast strange shadowy shapes on the walls, as if some of the spirits of the restless Talbots had left the vaults of St Grim to hold a meeting in the place which they had tenanted in life, and probably reluctantly abandoned in death : for if tradition and legend spake truth, they had

in old times been more notorious for the strong arm and daring spirit, than the just and holy heart.

Up the bare stairs the woman gropes her way, still folding her cloak closely about her, and scarcely able to repress a shiver as the wind sweeps up before her. The nearer she approaches the top of the stairs, the more her step lags, and on the last she actually sits down, rocks herself to and fro, and, from the stifled sound, weeps. It is very evident that the Oriel Room, brightly as its window glows in the October twilight, is not the pleasant place it would appear. She does not rest long, but rises suddenly, and before she gives herself time to change again, is in the room,—the largest and most cheerful-looking in Old Court ; but not happy, nevertheless.

The fire is piled high in the grate, and gives out light and heat enough to fill even that vast apartment, with its Oriel window at the upper end, almost a room of itself. The black wainscoat catches the gleams and shines duskily ; the red curtains of a carved oaken bedstead in a recess, and its white

coverlid folded down from several heaped-up pillows, daintily frilled ; the low, cushioned couch ; the few pictures in handsome but old frames, and choice in themselves ; the antique china vases filled with evergreens, and the soft carpet covering the floor, sufficiently attest the luxurious tastes of the ancient personage who occupies the Oriel Chamber,—tastes which neither age nor poverty have sufficed wholly to obliterate.

She is sitting in a high-backed chair, propped up with pillows ; her thin features drawn into a peevish, querulous expression ; her eyes, overshadowed by brows, arched, and still black, are fixed on the fire ; her elbows rest on the arms of her chair ; her hands, white and transparent, are clasped. She has not a word or a look for the new comer. She looks the very *beau ideal* of a cross, discontented, unhappy old woman.

“How do you feel now, grandmama?” said the other, coming up to her chair and bending down towards her.

“Neither better nor worse, Miriam : do make haste and get me my chocolate. I

thought you were never coming home to-night. I think you might have consideration enough for me to recollect how much I hate to be alone," said the elder lady. Without removing any part of her walking attire except her heavy cloak, Miriam drew a small table to her grandmother's side, and in a few minutes the impatient lady was consoling herself with a cup of hot chocolate, and some delicate biscuits.

Having thus administered to the wants of her exacting relative, Miriam Sedley went into an inner room, small and much less choicely furnished, but her own undisputed and private retreat: there she could indulge herself in a sigh of weariness, and even occasionally in a tear or two; but now she hastily disembarrassed herself of all her outer garments, put on a loose wrapping-gown of dark stuff, and immediately returned to the larger room. For a minute or two she stood musing before the fire, the red glow thrown upwards on her figure and face.

A young, beautiful girl? Nothing of the kind: her grandmother in the high-backed

chair, with the attenuated haughty features, is far more of a picture than she is. She is a little, dark person, and might be taken for any age between twenty and forty. There is some character in her face: not much feminine softness perhaps, and no strict regularity of feature, but a deep, steady eye, a firm lip, and broad brow: no lines of strong suffering or painful thought, but a quiet energy to do, and a resolute fortitude to endure: and much need has she for them. Her complexion is absolutely colourless, but not unhealthy, and her hair is very dark and abundant. It is just possible that in other circumstances hers might have been a distinguished countenance, but in the coarse stuff gown, unrelieved by trimming or ornament, the evidences of work and privation are too glaring for her slight figure and quiet face to overbalance them.

Her few moments of reflection passed, she seated herself at a table a short distance from the fire, lighted a lamp, and opened out her embroidery frame. During the day a teacher of music, she was at night a needle-



woman. It was hard drudgery, but Miriam was not one to murmur that all her time and all her labour went to gratify the selfish whims of her aged relative: it was a duty,—pity that it could not be made a pleasant one!

For an hour or more the only sounds in the room were the sharp click of Miriam's needle, and the cinders dropping from the bars. Mrs Sedley was meditative, or dosing: things synonymous in her vocabulary; it was quite a relief to the painful silence when St Grim's clock struck eight. For a while after that, Miriam's needle rather lagged over its gay flower-work: her fingers were tired, and her eyes ached with gazing on the bright tints. Her grandmother had been roused by the striking of the hour, and now sat peering at her coldly, almost angrily, from beneath her heavy brows. Miriam never idled long, and after a few minutes' pause she went on; not so rapidly as at first, but mechanically, steadily: quite unconscious of the unloving look that watched her so keenly.

“ You are not like other girls, Miriam,—how stupid and dull you grow. I shall not

know you soon if you go on in this mopish way. What a dress you disfigure yourself with!" said Mrs Sedley.

"You forget, grandmama, that I am not a girl now,—I am eight and twenty," replied Miriam, purposely disregarding the latter part of her grandmama's observation.

"You cannot mean that it is eleven years since Philip Warburton went abroad?"

"Yes, it is eleven years,—long ones they seem to me."

"If it were not for the change in your face and looks altogether, I should scarcely think it was five years ago: but you are so altered,—so—" Mrs Sedley hesitated.

"So plain, grandmama—I know it," added Miriam: "but it is fortunate, in my position. If I were beautiful, as you must have been, I could not go from house to house teaching, or asking for embroidery work. No, a beautiful face would be a great hindrance."

"I have had a visitor to-day: an unexpected one: no other than Philip Warburton," said Mrs Sedley, mollified by the compliment

to her vanished beauty. Neither the start, the vivid blush, the deathly pallor that succeeded it, nor the sigh of mingled weariness and trouble with which this announcement was received, escaped her: "You do not say anything, Miriam: I imagined he was a friend of yours."

"It is so long ago," replied Miriam, bending lower over her embroidery frame: "I was a mere child when he went away; he must have forgotten me."

"Few women are mere children at seventeen, and Philip Warburton has a tenacious memory."

"I shall forgive him, then, if he does not recognise me;—sometimes I scarcely know myself."

"No wonder: you neglect your dress; and certainly I cannot compliment you on inheriting my taste, or your father's either."

Miriam made no reply: it was vain to remind her selfish relative that her own fancies absorbed all the produce of her grandchild's labour; that the decent out-of-door garments were so scrupulously hoarded that they

might last the longer, and the unbecoming stuff-gown was an economical contrivance to save them still farther:—she thought, perhaps, that it was fortunate she did not inherit expensive tastes, since they could never have been lawfully gratified, and so would have become a torment; as in Mrs Sedley's case.

“It used to be considered disrespectful, when I was a girl, not to reply to our elders,” said the old lady stiffly; “but everything is changed since then—everything.”

“I meant no disrespect, grandmama.”

“No tiresome explanations, Miriam, pray!” interrupted Mrs Sedley peevishly: “I really believe you are becoming more stupid and indifferent every day;—you are almost insensible, I declare:—perhaps it is as well. You will tell me, next, that you were born without a heart as without beauty: any other girl would have feigned, even had she not felt, an interest in an old friend who has been absent for the last ten years and more.”

Little need of feigning on Miriam's part; she was only too curious, too interested in

Philip Warburton, to venture to ask questions about him. She would rather be taunted with insensibility than be suspected of loving unsought. Yes, the poor teacher was proud. She heard the accusation silently, and only stooped her head a little lower over her frame, and plied her needle more assiduously than before. Mrs Sedley, like some elderly women of narrow capacity and few pursuits, had a great delight in making a mystery out of a trifle, and a malicious pleasure in torturing the curiosity of her grandchild. The expression of Miriam's face was as legible to the keen-eyed old lady as were her sensations to Miriam herself; nevertheless it pleased her to accuse her of failings which were not hers, and of a want of affection: of which she—miserable, selfish mortal that she was—ought to have been the very last to charge her with; for Miriam's labours were the source from which she drew all her own luxuries and indulgences. True to her character, Mrs Sedley, after satisfying herself by a tolerably long scrutiny that Miriam was longing to hear

everything she could tell of Philip Warburton, lay back in her chair, folded her hands, closed her eyes, and settled herself for a comfortable dose; internally consigning her much-enduring companion to all the torments of suspense.

This was nothing new to Miriam; she merely glanced across to where her grandmother sat, and smiled with the slightest possible tinge of bitterness, as she repressed a sigh of disappointment. As the night went on she still worked, and passed in mental review the latter part of her life. It would not bear much reflection: it was very dull and monotonous—nothing to dwell on with satisfaction; nothing either to regret,—merely a tedious catalogue of duties done, and annoyances endured.

To say that Philip Warburton was not thought of in that meditative mood would be false; but to tell how or what she thought of him, would be exceedingly difficult. Brought up in that very room, and by that grim old lady, her youth had known but few pleasures: its greatest had been the rare visits paid by Philip Warburton, as a school-boy, to her

grandmother, when she was still involved in the mysterious labyrinths of Lindley Murray and cross-stitch ; and later on, but less often still, when he returned from college, grave and seemingly proud, yet with a fund of kindness and gentleness for "little Miriam:" as he always persisted in calling her, though she was sixteen. It is doubtful whether he had ever thought anything about her, except as a shrewd, clever girl, who bore with exemplary fortitude, amounting almost to indifference, the wearisome exactions and taunts of an abominable old woman, whose loss of fortune, and consequently of rank, had embittered a naturally bad temper to an insufferable point. *He* had seen many Miriams,—*she* had never seen but one Philip: there was the difference between them.

The Oriel Chamber had never looked so dreary as on that afternoon when Philip Warburton paid his farewell visit, and that a short one, to Mrs Sedley. More or less he had been in Miriam's thoughts daily since that memorable afternoon eleven years before; but whether the news of his visit gave more pain or plea-

sure now, would be no easy matter to decipher. He had been a pleasant, happy idea to muse upon; she had chosen to dream for him instead of herself:—perhaps five minutes' interview might overthrow all her preconceived notions; and how doubly wearisome her embroidery would become if he were to fall from his high estate in her imagination!

But that could scarcely be. She had heard him spoken of by people, who little thought how earnestly the poor music-teacher listened to their remarks, as a popular and rising character,—a man of the times and for the times. She had yet to learn how much a long-cherished idea is capable of influencing our fate for good or evil. It was not a wise thing altogether, perhaps, to suffer any one object to engross her thoughts as Philip Warburton had done;—eight-and-twenty should have had more sense; but Miriam was much the same in mind at that venerable age as she had been at eighteen. Her face had faded gradually, and her figure had lost its youthful roundness; these things, however, she had scarcely considered: she had retro-



graded,—he had matured. Foreign travel, study, society, for Philip Warburton,—Old Court and daily labour for Miriam Sedley : she was outwardly a middle-aged woman, he a talented, successful man of the world, with no more than thirty years on his shoulders.

We are not to suppose that these comparisons entered into Miriam's brain, for they were very far from it indeed : on the whole her reflections must have been of a more enlivening character ; for when St Grim's clock struck ten, and Mrs Sedley roused herself with a grunt, she rose gaily from her seat, and pushed her embroidery frame hastily upon the table.

“Have a little pity on my nerves, Miriam, do !” exclaimed the old lady sharply ; “give me my wine and water, and I will go to bed. It has been a very unpleasant evening : I might as well live alone as with such a silent, meditative being as yourself.”

Her behests were complied with in the mechanical manner peculiar to Miriam. The wine and water sipped, and a few devotion-al exercises dosed over, Miriam performed

the unenviable office of *femme de chambre* to her exacting relative. This important duty ended, without more than the usual amount of peevish rebuke, and the red curtains closed round the bed, Miriam rang the bell and returned to her embroidery. Willingly would she have desisted; but the work was promised by a certain day, and well she knew the penalty she must pay if she forfeited that promise.

In a few minutes the door opened cautiously and softly, and a woman armed with sweeping and hearth brushes, and all the paraphernalia of housemaids' work, came creeping into the room. Miriam turned and nodded her head slightly, then went on with her business. The new comer, who was a very old woman, knelt down before the fire, and proceeded to rake it out, burnish the grate, and replenish it with coal and sticks, for lighting next morning; she then pushed the chairs into their places, dusted the ornaments, shook up the sofa-cushions, and in the space of half-an-hour had succeeded in imparting to the place as

orderly and comfortless an aspect as it was capable of wearing.

“Do you want anything more to-night, Miss Sedley?” asked the portress and housemaid-general to Old Court.

“No, thank you, Martha, nothing more,” replied Miriam, looking up. Martha collected the implements of her profession, and went one step nearer the door. Poor old woman, she was Miriam’s salvation! She was the only creature who spoke a kindly word to her, or ever had seemed to think she could possibly have wants or feelings like other girls. After this nightly service was done, they generally talked in a low voice for fear of disturbing Mrs Sedley; and though Martha was *going* all the time she stayed, their chat often extended to twenty minutes or even more.

“Gossip with servants is improper,” some model reader may exclaim at this: “Miriam degraded herself sadly.”—Let me ask—have you been condemned to a life of loneliness and privation like hers? if not, let me tell you, you are no fit judge for her:—fully to appre-

ciate her position you must endure it. Poor soul, she would not have thought conversation with the meanest of God's creatures degrading! much less than with so staid and stately a dame as old Martha; who, clad after the fashion of twenty years before, hating new-fangled notions, and precise in her habits and principles, was as respectable as a retainer of so respectable an establishment should be. But Martha shall speak for herself.

"I'm sure, Miss Sedley, you will be cold. Pray you now, don't sit up long over that stitch work; it makes my eyes ache only to look at it: and surely it can't be true,—but they tell me now that they can make carpet work in their looms fifty times finer than ladies can work, and cheaper besides."

"I am afraid that it is the case,—or will be soon," replied Miriam.

"I can't abide them factories!" said Martha, spitefully. Miriam cordially agreed with her.

"I may say, with Madam there, everything is changed since I was a girl," continued the old woman, pointing to the bed:—"every-

thing. Why, I was born not four hundred yards from this very spot where I am standing now. It was in a cottage with a fine oak planting at the back, and a grass field sloping down to the river. Where could you pick out an inch of ground in this brick and mortar wilderness that looks as if it had ever been a country place? Why, it might have been standing since the flood, it's so black. I think the very seasons themselves is different from what they was: the summers is hot enough, but it is a stifling sort of heat; not bright and shiny like, but a burning fog. Then the winters: they were hard enough to be sure, even then, but they never made such *deed* amongst poor folks as now. You didn't hear then of women and childer dying of hunger within a stone's throw of Old Court. The Talbots had a full purse, and they were not close-handed either:—yes, those were the times,—the good times folks like to preach about so much!”

“ You are attached to the old race, Martha.”

“ Indeed Miss, and I am. I have eaten of

their bread for eighty years and more, and it does spite me to see this new order of things : cotton-spinners buying up land over the heads of the old lords ; setting themselves up as their equals and betters ; getting made members of parliament and the like ! Cotton lords, forsooth ! cotton muck, say I !”

“ You are a furious aristocrat, Martha !” said Miriam, smiling at the old woman’s wrath.

“ Somebody had the impudence to poke a paper under the gate yesterday ; I brought it in, thinking it was a bill of some sale or other ; but when I came to look at it, I found it was some of their chartist rubbish, about the worst and the weakest going to the wall :—meaning the old nobility,—aristocrats as they call them. If I had had the man that wrote that paper, I would have asked him a question or two on his own text ;—ay, and answered them for him too. I’d have said,—Tell me, you Sir, has not ‘ the Order,’ as you are pleased to call it :—has not the Order been good and true in its generation ? else why has it stood so long ? Why does it stand yet firm and fast, while your vile mob is howl-

ing for its downcome? Ay, and they may howl on, the vagabonds: it will outlast them!"

"There must be a fault somewhere, Martha: a whole people never raises an outcry about nothing. I am almost afraid to pass along the streets sometimes, when I see the men's scowling looks, the women almost worse, and children by dozens rolling in the mud, shrieking out their doggrel rhymes almost before they can speak plain."

"There is a fault, Miss Sedley; and a black fault it is:—a sin, indeed. But it isn't amongst these miserable working fellows: it isn't among the great lords, either; but amongst them mill owners and the like. They may be clever men, and 'enterprising men,' and all that; but only look at the riches they've scraped together, some of them. How have they got it, I should like to know, if it is not by grinding the faces of their poor workmen: by giving 'em wages that'll hardly keep body and soul together? Oh yes, they've laid up, they have, and gathered into barns; and much may their gains profit 'em. In nine cases out of ten, these

men, risen from the people, make harder masters than these old lords of feudal times, that we read of in books. *Then* there was some dependence, and somebody to look to in days of trouble: but now, the poor belong to nobody, and as it is nobody's business to see they're fed, so half of 'em starve. Mr Nobody has a great deal of work on his hands; and he had better get somebody to help him to do it, I can tell him: and let him begin by seeing that workers get a fair share of the profits of their work, and that the money gathered by a thousand hands does not all go into one pocket."

"Ah! Martha, what a fine politician nature spoiled when she made you a woman."

"You are laughing at me, Miss, now, I know:—but if you could only remember things that I do. Oft when I look out of this big Oriel window I think of my poor mistress, Miss Maude Talbot's grandmother that was: this was her favourite room. When she was young there was only one factory built, just outside the Park: on



what had been the Hardwicke property, but they sold it. She used to sit and stare at it and the folk going to their work at noon, and the smoke clouding the sky over, till the tears ran down her cheeks, they did; for she was knit to the place by many ties: so many of her kin—father, mother, child—were in the vault of St Grim; and she was born and married, and all, here. But my lord said they must go; and so they did; and they told me he made a vast of money by the land: but he had enough before, said I. Poor lady! what would she feel if she could look out now, and see them roofs one over another, and them frightful chimneys, and not a green field far or near? she would have good reason to thank God for having taken her from the evil to come.”

“But, Martha, all this change has not been without its use. Cheap manufactures and improved manufactures are profitable to every body who needs them. Then this land produces to Miss Talbot a revenue of ten times the amount that her father drew from it at her birth; and she being richer,

the sphere of her benevolence may be extended. Look at this very place: what an excellent charity it is! If the Hardwicke factory had never been built, the Talbots might have lived here still, and we should all have been struggling in the wide world against adverse fortune. Indeed, Martha, I cannot wish this place other than it is:—it furnishes occupation for thousands instead of hundreds; and cheaper times, we will hope, are at hand for the very distressed.”

“Well, ma’am, and till they do come, I hope Mr Philip Warburton will advise Miss Maude Talbot to give ’em something to keep ’em from perishing:—Hope is very well in its way, I’ve not a doubt; but I should say it must be uncommon light in the way of food.”

“Is Mr Warburton connected with the Talbots?” asked Miriam, raising her head suddenly from her work.

“He was made one of Miss Maude’s guardians till she came of age:—that was fixed at eighteen instead of one-and-twenty, for her father had a high opinion of her;

and I do hear she is a clever, spirited lady, and rare and good to the poor. That is why Mr Warburton is down from London, now: he is a very free-spoken gentleman, you know, Miss Sedley, so he remembered me. He told me there was going to be grand doings up at the Priory, and that I need not be surprised if Miss Maude came down amongst us some day; for she has a grand curiosity to see Old Court: she has heard tell of it so much. They do say, too, she is wonderful for beauty:—why she couldn't be a true Talbot if she were not."

Miriam was sorely tempted to ask about Philip Warburton's visit; but, fearful of betraying the interest she felt in him to the lynx-eyed Martha, she refrained. Martha, however, was disposed to be communicative; and having run down her favourite quarry, the Cotton Lords, she was quite ready for any smaller game that came in her way.

"You did not see Mr Warburton, Miss, I think?—No, you was out. Madam had him all to herself. Deary me, but he is changed! He was such a handsome young man when he went

abroad, but now he is so grave and brown, and almost stern, I thought. There was his old smile left when he spoke, however, and his kind way of speaking to one; but such a grand air with him. I could not help saying to myself he was a strange, fine guardian to choose for such a sweet lady as Miss Maude Talbot."

Martha's random shot forced Miriam's reflections into a new channel all at once: with something like jealousy she heard the praise of Philip Warburton's ward; then she was annoyed at herself for the foolish though momentary feeling. "What right have I to feel jealous of Maude Talbot?—let him love her, if he likes,—he is nothing to me." So much did her own sensations occupy her, that she did not return Martha's good night; who, after making a few observations which met with no reply, thought Miss Sedley was tired, and took her departure.

The closing of the door after her roused Miriam. She looked up from her work, and cast her eyes round the great dreary room, light in no part now, but the small circle falling on her frame from the single lamp.

Miriam Sedley was superstitious: like most people who have been inured to a solitary life. Not fearful, or cowardly in the presence of actual danger, but apt to take presentiments for assured and inevitable precursors of evil. Old Court had been her home from six years of age. Her parents had died, her mother at her birth, her father two years after; the intervening four years had been spent with an elderly aunt of her mother's.

Of this period Miriam still retained a vivid and affectionate remembrance. The daily kindness, the gentleness of her old relative; the wild hill country where they lived; flowers, birds, green fields, bright rivers; the sea, the rocks, the ships, the clear sky, were all inextricably mixed up in her mind with that one solitary being who had loved her. Then came the vague impression of great sorrow: a separation from every one she had known, a long journey, and a meeting with a stately, elderly lady in the Oriel Chamber, who kissed her coldly, and seemed anything but glad she was come. From that time

forward there had been little change. Her childhood was a very lonely time. She had no companions, no toys, and few books; even those were of a character beyond a child's understanding; and her tasks were made distasteful to her by the harshness of her grandmother, who was her sole teacher for several years. Sewing she utterly abhorred, and consequently every slight offence was visited upon her by a long piece of hemming or seaming.

It was a great pleasure to her to play about by herself in the flagged courtyard under the trees, and gather the green moss, (if anything could be green in such a locality) to cover an old stone seat which still remained in one angle of the wall. In her enthusiasm she had even gone so far as to get two flags removed, and the space filled with mould for the purpose of cultivating flowers. The old man who came occasionally to prune the ivy and sweep away fallen leaves, gave her a rose bush, which he said would bear well if it were like the tree from which it was a slip; but Miriam watched it a whole summer through in vain: the leaves hung lank and discoloured;

the few buds it did put forth never opened ; she could not tell even what colour the roses would have been had they chosen to blow.

The snow fell early in October that year. Miriam had been out for an hour in the morning, and as usual had stood a long time over her rose tree, wondering if it ever would flower or not ; in the afternoon she sat sewing in the Oriel window ; presently it clouded over, then down came the white snow, whirling and driving through the air. She let her hands fall on her knees, surprised at first ; but at length she burst into a passionate fit of crying for her poor rose tree : for even her sanguine spirit could not resist this denial of all her hope. Mrs Sedley, cold and severe as she was, could not help pitying her ; though she did tell her that if she gave way in that manner whenever her expectations were disappointed, her life would have more tears than smiles in it.

Martha, the portress, and Miriam, were friends from the beginning. The old woman had a natural fondness for children, and pet animals of every description. Her room was

also the library of the Court; there were a good many volumes of ancient romances, and some works of a graver character: these were Lives of the Talbots, and long histories of their doings for king and country; every sentence tending to exalt them in their own esteem and that of the world in general.

But best of all, Martha had a seemingly inexhaustible fund of personal adventures and experiences to relate. The rise and progress of the manufacturing colony in the centre of which they vegetated, the annals of the Talbots when she lived amongst them, and sundry legends of Old Court itself, in the times when the Hall echoed to the song of the troubadour and the laughter of courtly dames and demoiselles, and the great yard resounded with the horn of the huntsman and the prancing of high-mettled horses. It was mostly in the winter twilight that these stories were recited and listened to: Miriam, perched in a high-backed chair, her little feet resting on a stool, her hands folded and her face bent slightly forward in eagerness to catch every word; the good-natured Martha opposite her, as proud



to tell, as her auditor was delighted to hear, these wonderful tales—every one of them true, which was not their least charm.

Until Miriam was about twelve years old this state of things continued uninterrupted; the change that followed was as unexpected as it was at first disagreeable. One morning Miriam, thinking her grandmother was still asleep, and also that it was high time she awoke—breakfast having waited half an hour at least, and the youthful appetite being impatient—she began to sing in a low voice the words of an old song which she had learnt from one of Martha's books. She sat on her low stool by the fire, peering into the bars and singing sweetly and yet passionately the quaint lines,—some plaint of forsaken damsel, doubtless, for the only words Mrs Sedley could hear (for she was awake all the time) were—"Never more, never more," repeated as the refrain of each verse. She turned her head hastily to the bed at a movement of Mrs Sedley, and ceased singing.

The old lady asked her who had taught her the tune. "No one," she replied; "she had invented it, for the song in one of Martha's

romances." Her reply excited Mrs Sedley's attention; she had hitherto despised Miriam as a rather dull child, but this incident gave a better insight into her character. During the day she made her repeat the song, and many others that she had set to tunes of her own imagining. She questioned her also on various subjects, and discovered that whilst she had with infinite difficulty been instilling into her mind the first dry elements of grammar and geography, the girl had been sedulously storing her brain with the treasures of ancient literature.

These tastes so accidentally betrayed, opened up to Mrs Sedley a sphere of usefulness for her granddaughter. Her income was very limited, but a trifle could be spared to carry forward the child's education; and that concluded, the shrewd lady judged rightly in supposing that she would be more than repaid for any temporary inconvenience she might choose to undergo. With this idea, a competent person was sought, who for a small remuneration would teach Miriam music, and such other accomplishments as were necessary to make her in her own turn a teacher.

In a great town, persons of that class are not difficult to meet with, and in a week from the time of the discovery of Miriam's talent for music, she was placed for four hours a day under the care of a tall, thin lady, always lightly clad, and afflicted with a perpetual cough. She had been a public singer, but ill health having necessitated her retirement, she had subsided into a teacher of her art, and was now quite forgotten by everybody, who in her pristine beauty and success, had predicted for her a long career of triumph.

Hard work acting on a feeble constitution, soon reduced poor Madame Dufour to a shadow; her pupils fell away, and by the time Miriam was seventeen, the music teacher fell away too, and died suddenly one evening on her return home, after eleven hours of music lessons. Every body who read of the event in the newspapers was very sorry and very much shocked; but it was necessary that their daughters should continue their study; so in a very short space of time her place was filled up: in many cases by Madame's favourite pupil Miriam Sedley. The office to her was

at first odious, but by degrees this dislike wore off. She cared little for impertinent observations, and the pecuniary remuneration was ample; so that Mrs Sedley was enabled to enjoy many luxuries to which she must otherwise have remained a stranger.

At the time our story opens, Miriam had been a music teacher rather more than ten years.

## CHAPTER II.

### MIRIAM'S PATH IN THE WIDE WORLD.

THE charms of morning in country places have had many celebrators; the charms of morning in town but few. Yet even in the vicinity of Old Court there was a certain degree of freshness, in the earlier hours of the day: an absence of that reek and steam of human life, close crowded in narrow dwellings, that made noon heavy, and evening nauseous. In that neighbourhood, the working-day began at six o'clock; then there was quietness in the streets until eight, when the stream poured out from the mill-gates, home to breakfast. In again at half-past; and then only a few loiterers, children and men out of work were to be met.

About a quarter to nine, summer and winter, fair weather and foul, Miriam Sedley came out on her daily rounds. Always more up-looking and brighter in the morning than at her return; yet, no matter how dulled and wearied at night, setting off with a brisk step and cheerful face next day. It was an elastic spirit hers—not apt to brood over trifles; having received a wrong, not magnifying it; expecting an evil, not turning aside weakly, but facing and conquering it. Many a dreaded trouble boldly met had she proved a very shadow, unsubstantial, flying before a courageous, helpful will. Not worldly wise, but having far more insight into the wrongs and sufferings of “the masses,” than many a politician who talks learnedly by the hour of their ways and wants; she had not gone her allotted path with her eyes shut. Many young children had she pityingly watched through their kennel-training, to their tawdry, bedecked, shameless girlhood, and loud, flaunting maturity: or, less wretched, to their pauper grave in St Grim’s churchyard, when star-

vation or typhus cut them off early in their days, to their own everlasting gain and their parents' temporary ease—for a month the less to fill, though that month be a child's, amongst those very poor, is truly a care the less.

There were few of those who lived in the streets by which Miriam daily passed, who did not know her, and knowing did not reverence her. They acknowledged her one of a class far above themselves, yet they saw her working for her bread as they did,—having a task to do, and doing it: not idle, in gay plumes and soft raiment, with a listless face in search of pleasure, but alert in the duty of her position,—her joys probably as scant as their own, and her toils not much less severe. Poor too, but yet sparing a mite to the utterly destitute; and where she could not help, never giving the pleader a hard word or disgustful look. Not a fireside in all that district but held Miriam Sedley's name a Household Word; not a vile den of iniquity but she might have passed, day or night, unharmed, uninsulted.

She had slept little the night before, but

there was no perceptible weariness in her face as she walked rapidly through the streets ; she was always grave and pale at her very best. Perhaps if an interested eye or a loving one had been in the habit of scanning her countenance, it might have detected a slight contraction of the brow ; but as none such ever did, that trifling sign of mental disquietude escaped comment. The woman who sold matches by St Grim's Porch, and had a few poisonous compositions to gratify the youthful palate, looked after her, envious of her ever pleasant glance, and wondered what sort of a look she would wear if she had a husband transported, a son in jail, a daughter worse than dead, and two little ones down in the typhus, in a wretched lean-to garret which she dignified with the name of home.

Miriam had not a very long walk before her for her first lesson, which was at nine ; she therefore slackened her pace as she neared her destination, which was a small house standing back in a flagged yard, the abode of a Roman Catholic Priest. There was a group of vagrant Irish hanging round the



gateway, but they made way for Miriam immediately; and, as is the custom with the tribe, poured out noisy blessings mingled with mendicant whinings as she passed through them. Miriam had nothing to give, but she shook her head gently, and her eye wandered over them, resting for a moment pityingly on a footsore-mother with a child in her arms; so no curses followed her, as they would have done had she repelled them haughtily or harshly.

The house door was opened before she reached it, by a tall ascetic-looking man, who came out and, bowing slightly to Miriam, passed forward to the flock at the gate, followed by a middle-aged woman with a basketful of bread—the priest's daily dole to the poor. Whilst they were clamorously receiving his bounty, Miriam entered the house, opened a door to the right of the passage, and went in. There was little furniture in the room, and that of the simplest description; except a piano, which nearly filled one side of it. There was a girl standing by it turning over some music. She seated herself as Miriam advanced, merely bowing

in reply to her teacher's salutation, and began to play with exemplary patience a series of very difficult exercises. Miriam drew a chair and sat down. For twenty minutes not a word was spoken on either side, except the monotonous counting; then Miriam took her pupil's place, and commenced the accompaniment of a mass which was silently placed before her. It was a very clear, fresh voice that filled the little room, but with a strange thrill of sadness in it: rather more than usual probably, for Miriam looked up in her pupil's face more than once during the lesson. Nothing, however, was to be gathered from the pale, sallow face, or blue eye steadily fixed on the page she was practising: she might have been an automaton for any expression of feeling she betrayed.

The lesson ended, Miriam rose and drew on her gloves. Whilst she was standing, the door opened, and the priest came in with his customary grave bow. Miriam thought she had never seen two countenances so exactly alike in feature and impassibility as those before her—making allowance for

the difference of age and sex; nor yet two countenances so accurately moulded, and utterly deficient in either the glow or shadow of human passion. Mr Fairfax might be forty, certainly not less, possibly more; tall and of athletic form, but spare and gaunt, almost to attenuation; the skin of his face was clear and sallow, the blue veins shining through on the bare temples; his hair was of a deep brown, and curled thickly in his neck and over the ears. His mouth was peculiarly marked; the lips, thin and sharply cut, were ordinarily compressed. This feature was repeated in his niece with extraordinary fidelity, but its severity in the female face was more striking. Her hair, wavy and of the same colour as his, was taken away from the broad prominent brow, and twisted into a thick knot at the back of her small and well shaped head.

As Mr Fairfax advanced into the room, his niece looked up from the music that she was arranging.

“Miss Sedley, has Edith told you of her movements?” asked the priest, waving his

hand towards a chair for Miriam to be seated.

"No; we have had no conversation," replied the music teacher.

"This is her last lesson with you:—I am going to lose her;" and, if such a thing were possible, Miriam might have imagined that there was a repressed quiver in the fine sonorous voice; it was gone, however, when he spoke next. "Yes, I am going to lose her: she has chosen her vocation,—a blessed one may it be to her!—and it will remove her from me entirely and for ever on earth, probably; but into holy hands I shall remit her, if God please, to meet again in his eternal kingdom. My niece, Miss Sedley, has chosen to dedicate herself to Heaven—to become a nun,—and to join herself in that profession with her mother's relatives in Italy. Thus much it may interest you to know concerning her future destiny; for you have known her from a child, and have always been good and patient with her: those things never fail to make themselves a niche in our remembrance.—Edith will recollect you in Italy."

“Gratefully ;” said the girl, who was standing beside the priest’s chair. Miriam smiled.

“We are of different faiths, Miss Sedley, but we have one Master and one Father, even God. May he requite you for all your kindness to my niece. You have been truly charitable to us, poor strangers, and He will not forget you. We do not live far apart ; do not let your step be strange on my threshold : some one to speak to of her when she is gone, will not be unwelcome :—it takes more than the length of mortal life to wear out mortal love.”

Miriam held out her hand to Edith, as she promised that she would see Mr Fairfax occasionally, when her many duties permitted.

“It is little a poor priest of my church can do for those of yours ; but if ever you should stand in need of counsel or aid, as far as my help will go, you have a sure friend in Henry Fairfax,” said the priest, rising. A few words of farewell were spoken on either side, and Miriam passed out into the hall with Edith, who still held her hand.

“ You will have thought me cold and ungrateful for all your goodness, Miss Sedley ; but indeed it is not so : I have felt too deeply to say much. Ten years have I loved you dearly, tenderly ; but never till this moment, when we part for ever, could I tell you so. Oh ! forgive me all I have ever done to grieve you, and think of me kindly sometimes, will you ? ”

“ Indeed I will, Edith,” replied Miriam, startled at this sudden dropping of the veil ; “ you have never caused me pain, never in all those years.”

“ Thank you for that assurance ;—take this tiny cross, which I have long worn in expectation of this moment, and keep it for my sake. You see I have not the courage to fight against the world you dare so bravely, so I must take shelter under the protection of a nun’s veil.”

The church clock struck ten.

“ Go, now, I am detaining you from your labour by my tardy confessions,—go.”

She kissed Miriam twice, and turned back. The music teacher wiped her eyes and

lowered her veil as she went out of the flagged yard into the streets. "I should have judged her less hardly. I might have known by my own heart that the strongest feelings rarely make the most display," said she to herself, as she hurried on to make up for lost time.

This lesson was a charity on Miriam's part. Mr Fairfax had been a firm friend to Madame Dufour during her adversity, and she had taught his little niece without receiving pecuniary remuneration. Edith Fairfax was one of the first whom Miriam taught after her old mistress's death, and without doubt she had a strong interest in the child; for notwithstanding her peculiarly undemonstrative character, she evinced the most brilliant talent for music : which was Miriam's passion, then.

About six months after, Mr Fairfax told Miriam that his niece must discontinue her lessons and make his own tuition in her favourite study suffice, for that his income was so small, and had so many demands upon it, that he could no longer afford to set aside so large a sum for Edith's music.

Miriam at once begged to carry forward the lessons, offering to do so gratuitously three times in the week. After some hesitation the priest accepted the offer, and for upwards of nine years this gratuitous instruction had been continued.

It is my object to give a sketch of Miriam Sedley's day, and for that purpose we must follow her through the streets to a distant part of the town, where lived her most distinguished pupils. There was not much astir at that early hour of the morning, but it would have needed something extraordinary indeed, to distract Miriam's thoughts from her own business. She walked steadily on, turning neither to the right nor the left, with the same grave, earnest look that had marked her face all her life. Only one person spoke to her,—an old watchmaker, who lived at a corner of one of the superior streets, and generally contrived to be standing in the door-way as she passed, to give her good morning. He regulated the clock at Old Court, and had done so for forty years, so that he had known Madame Sedley, as he



called her, and the "little Miss," ever since they came to live there; now he had the care of Miriam's silver watch and kept it in order for nothing,—indeed I strongly suspect that at the very first she had had it at a merely nominal price. Certainly Miriam Sedley had no truer or more disinterested admirer than Jacob Smith.

As she came to the wide streets of private houses, the foot passengers became very few; there everything had a clean, prim, well-ordered look, so very different from the quarter she had left, that she may be forgiven surely for wishing sometimes to transport Old Court and its dependencies into a more healthy neighbourhood. The house to which she was going was a large, handsome, stone edifice, with bay windows, a flight of steps, portico, area, balcony, and all complete. There was an aspect of substantial wealth about it, and solid comfort, thoroughly English. The door was opened by a stout footman, and Miriam tripped across the hall to her school-room in no small trepidation, for she was conscious of being behind her

time,—and this was a place where no one would willingly transgress the rules of punctuality. A stout, massive lady, rose from her seat as Miriam entered the room. “You are late Miss Sedley,” were the only words she spoke as she swept out at the doorway, completely filling it with her amplitude of rustling brocade.

“Mama is on her high horse this morning,” whispered a fat, fair girl of fourteen, the youngest of five in the school-room at that moment, as she relieved Miriam of her cloak and bonnet: for her lessons here were long. These five girls were the hopeful progeny of Mr and Mrs Simpson, the wealthy proprietors of the Hardwicke Factory. They were all short, all fair, all fat; the two eldest were “out,” but still took lessons in singing, as their mother laboured under the delusion that they excelled in that accomplishment:—a dire mistake, from which, unfortunately, she was the only person who did not suffer; for it was real torture to a fine ear to listen to their thin, reedy voices, strained to the highest pitch, in executing

the showy bravuras which Mrs Simpson insisted were the only things deserving their attention. They were all good-natured girls in the main, but were united in a body to oppress and tyrannise over an elderly governess of very crushed appearance, whom they called "Propriety." These young ladies rejoiced in the names of Matilda, Julia, Laura, Beatrice, and Sophia, — which, it must be acknowledged, were their only distinguishing characteristics. Even "Propriety," (whose real name was Dawson) though she had known them from their babyhood, was apt to confound them, they were so very much alike in all other respects.

"My dear Laura!" ejaculated Propriety, shaking her head meekly at the young lady who spoke disrespectfully of her mama.

"Pray, don't charge me with Sophy's delinquencies, my dear Propriety; I have enough of my own to answer for," exclaimed Laura pertly from a distant corner of the room.

"Was it Sophy? Ah! I think my sight is not so good as it used to be," extenuatingly replied Miss Dawson.

“ You should get spectacles,—many people wear them at your age,” said Laura.

If poor Propriety could have resented anything, it would have been this unkind cut at her antiquity, for she was excessively tenacious of her juvenility, like most unmarried women of upwards of forty ; but knowing, by experience, that in a wordy war, the victory was always on the side of her pupils, she refrained, and only applied herself, with a grain more acrimony than usual, to the correction of a marvellously ill-spelt dictation of Miss Sophia's.

Matilda, the eldest girl, was meantime torturing the piano and Miriam Sedley, with an operatic air which needed some passionate expression to render it properly ; but the fair unsentimental damsel sang it in much the same style as she would have accorded to that venerable air, “ Polly put the kettle on,” if under any circumstances she could have been induced to degrade her fine talent by attempting it. This system was carried through with all the five ;—there was neither a better nor a worse amongst them : they were

all equally deficient in the natural requisites for making a good musician. It was very painful to Miriam to teach such uncredit-able performers ; but she could not, unfortunately, choose her own pupils. After four hours' weary work, and partaking of the children's dinner—to which Mrs Simpson made her heartily welcome, for she was not a woman to begrudge the creature-comforts, from which she herself profited so much, to any one—Miriam set forward to her next employers.

It was the most fashionable hour of the day at which she left the Simpsons, and the handsome street in which they lived had its usual share of gay promenaders ; for though cold, the day was bright and clear. Miriam always hurried through them, intent on her business ; but on this day, as she descended the steps from the wealthy manufacturer's door, her attention was fixed by two persons walking slowly side by side up the street before her, whilst a handsome carriage moved at foot's pace close by the pavement, evidently in attendance on them. It needed no

second glance to assure Miriam that the one was Philip Warburton, and the other she rightly conjectured to be Miss Talbot. Almost unconsciously she accommodated her pace to theirs. But her thoughts were all for Philip. How much taller and more manly he looked, and how totally unchanged was his proud way of carrying his head. She was glad to see this unchanged, she had admired it so much, secretly.

The carriage drew up at the end of the street, the footman held the door open, and Miss Talbot got in. Miriam caught but one glimpse of her face:—how freshly beautiful, and young, and bright it was, she remembered many a long day after. Philip Warburton stepped back, raised his hat as the carriage drove off, and turned briskly to retrace the way he had come. He was not many yards in advance of Miriam, and she saw the expression, never more hopeful, never more happy, on his face as he came towards her. It was the same Philip Warburton in voice, and look, and everything, doubtless; but, without any witchery, the poor teacher

discerned that the days in the Oriel window long ago were forgotten, and must hope for no renewal. He even did not recognise her.

Ah! Miriam, could you have known the thoughts stirring in his busy heart, you would not have wondered at that! Besides, you yourself are so changed:—so thin, pale, and joyless!

Miriam quickened her pace, to make up for her former loitering: feelings must yield to duty, in cases where bread is to be earned and work done. The next place Miriam stopped at was a plain, unpretending house inhabited by a clergyman, his wife, and one daughter. Mary Bland was one of Miriam's pet pupils; she was a kindly, considerate girl, who always had some little token of civility for her teacher. It was sometimes a bunch of flowers, or a concert ticket, or a present of fruit. But her health was delicate and her talent small; so, though she often soothed Miriam's irritated nerves by some thoughtful word or action, that signified here, at least, she was something more than a music-teach-

ing machine, she added no laurels to her fame.

The next on Miriam's list was Mabel Staunton, a girl of great personal beauty and extraordinary powers; and, moreover, with both the will and the power to make them available for her advancement. She was poor but respectably born; orphaned, but living under the roof of her uncle, the organist of the High Church. She was preparing for a professional career, and certainly, as far as human foresight could go, she was likely to be successful.

"Ah! Miriam Sedley," she would often say, "if you had been born beautiful, what a fate might yours have been! Such a glorious voice, such power of pathos and passion, to be shut up in a tiny, colourless shrine like this! — I almost envy them: — but I will remember you when I am what I know I shall be one day." Miriam would smile and wish her all possible honour and renown, — inwardly recalling the fate of Madame Dufour, but never hinting it to Mabel. Oh, no! She of all persons knew how much



these hopes are, to the very young, to trench on such dangerous ground. This lesson was apt to stretch beyond its right limits, for it was a positive enjoyment to the two to hear each other's voices; and Miriam usually arrived out of breath, and pretty nearly exhausted, at her last stopping place.

This was a chandler's, who had a musical daughter; and of all the people whom she attended, these were the least civil in their behaviour to her. She was to them a music mistress, who wore shabby clothes and lived at the Talbot Almshouse (as some people called Old Court), and nothing more. Marianne, or "Mery Han," as her mother pronounced the name, was a dashing, conceited girl, with a very high opinion of herself; attributable to the adulation she received from all about her. Her voice was undoubtedly magnificent—superior even to Mabel Staunton's; but her pronunciation was odious. Miriam had done much to improve this, but her efforts were counteracted by the affectation of the girl herself.

Every day passed in much the same man-

ner with Miriam Sedley ; her pupils, to be sure, were different on every other day, but they were not sufficiently various to have any marked influence on the monotony of her life. The close attendance which Mrs Sedley demanded in her evening hours, prevented the acceptance of those invitations which, at the beginning, her musical abilities had made frequent: a very rare attendance at a public concert was all she could ever compass, and even that was bought at the price of a week's wearisome taunting.

My object, in giving this outline of a day's occupation in Miriam's life, and in introducing people who hold no place in this story, is to shew how entirely bare of pleasure, how destitute of enjoyment, her life had been, for those ten brightest years of woman's existence ; and, in displaying this mental and moral torpor, to trace the cause of her prematurely aged person, and immature heart. Perhaps I am wrong in calling its ignorance of affection, immaturity ; I should rather have written inexperience. But as I hold that happiness cannot exist without the sanctify-

ing presence of love and household affections, —things she had only guessed at,—I may safely say that Miriam Sedley had but little idea of what happiness meant; and if she had never been happy, her feelings were immature:—it may be, were never to learn the ripening influence of that vivifying sun.

Could she have analysed her own emotions, she would probably have called them untimely blossoms, unfructifying, and destined soon to perish. But Miriam's was not an analytical disposition, therefore she had not discovered how vain, foolish, and self-tormenting were the fancies she had allowed herself to form; and also how vague and baseless they were.

On her homeward route, after her last lesson was given, she returned resolutely to her old habit of dreaming; quite excluding the reflection of the young face of Maude Talbot from her visions, and raising up only the object of her ten years' secret thoughts in the person of Philip Warburton. She knew him talented, good, popular;—she had *seen* him beautiful as she had ever imagined:

—was he not worthy the hidden worship she offered him? She thought so.

Go home Miriam!—if these imaginations have the power to shut out the view of those squalid streets,—those sights and sounds of misery,—there is more wisdom in your airy-built castles than in many a schemer's more substantial plottings.

November's dreary days went over; Christmas time was at hand,—was here. There were no sprightly doings, however, at Old Court: no gathering of kinsfolk or friends; no merry meetings, where the aged recalled their youth in the gaiety of their descendants. The ancient dames for the most part ate their solitary meal in the seclusion of their own rooms, listened to the bells of St Grim's, and, such as were able, joined with their neighbours, high and low, in the Holy Supper, where all are equal in God's eye.

Mrs Sedley, however, was sick, therefore Miriam had to play the part of watcher and nurse during the whole long day; a sufficiently arduous task it may well be supposed: some irritable people are insuffer-

ably ill-natured when in pain, and certainly Mrs Sedley was so. Poor Miriam sat in the Oriel window as the old ladies crept off to church; she would have given much for the like liberty.

It was not a bright Christmas day, such as one loves to see; but a thick, misty, steamy day, boding ill to man's health. There was an oppression in the atmosphere which did not fail to communicate itself to Miriam's thoughts. She looked more than usually grave, as she sat with her open Bible lying unread on her knee: if anything, she was thinner, and the angles of her mouth more marked than two months before; but she had not the air of any one suffering or distressed. Day by day, since that afternoon when she had seen Philip Warburton, had she expected and looked for his coming again to Old Court. Though she might not see, she should hear of him, and that was something; but all her longing and looking were of no avail: patient she must have been, else had her heart sunk under the sickness of hope deferred. She was thinking about him, as she sat

silently over her neglected Bible, wondering why he had never been; quite unsuspecting of the small share she had ever had in his thoughts, and attributing his prolonged absence to every cause but the right one. She turned over the leaves of the book idly, glancing out, now and then, at the gaunt trees, motionless in the dull grey air, and the leaden sky over them. Somehow they seemed to typify and connect themselves with her fate. I have said before, Miriam was superstitious: the omen struck coldly on her heart, and spite of herself, clung there and was remembered. Trying to shake off the fear, and go on with her interrupted dream of Philip, was useless; so, after some time, she reverted to her Bible. The first words on which her eye fell were these :—

“Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it; if a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would be utterly contemned.”

The book was immediately closed and laid aside: she could read no more after that, but rose and walked to the fire. Mrs Sedley was

not yet up, and she lay fretting and unhappy, with her eyes fixed on Miriam. She had been excessively cross and impatient half an hour before, but her grandchild looking towards her, noticed some striking change in her countenance, and instantly went to the bedside.

“Pray, grandmama, let me send for Mr Groves: I am sure you are worse than you will allow,” said Miriam gently, laying her hand on the bony fingers of Mrs Sedley, which were clutching uneasily at the coverlet. Mrs Sedley drew her hand away sharply, and uttered an inarticulate growl. There was nothing for it but forbearance with such a patient, so Miriam returned to her seat in the Oriel window. There she sat until the people returned from church, Martha amongst the rest. The old servant came up to Mrs Sedley’s room immediately, to see if anything was needed. Her first words were unfortunate :

“Ah, Miss Sedley! this is not the day for the season, is it? I always say a green Christmas makes a full church-yard; an’ I’m like to be right, for they say that shocking cholera

is broke out among the poor folks hereabouts."

"What is that you are saying, Martha?" asked Mrs Sedley, eagerly. Martha repeated.

"Pshaw!" snapped the old lady, turning her face from them.

Miriam ate her dinner in solitary silence, for Mrs Sedley refused to touch anything: during the whole of the afternoon she continued in a semi-lethargic state. When it grew dark, Miriam closed the curtains and lighted the lamp. She felt frightened, she knew not of what, and could not enjoy the twilight as she used to do, so she ensconced herself in her grandmother's easy-chair by the fire. About six o'clock the church-bells rang out a merry peal, quite suddenly, breaking the silence, and making Miriam start from her seat. In half an hour there was an interval of quiet.

"What are the bells ringing for?" asked Mrs Sedley from the bed.

"It is Christmas night, grandmama," replied Miriam, approaching her.

"I remember now,—Christmas night."—



“Will you have anything, grandmama ! You have not tasted since morning.”

“Is Henry here ?”

“Who, grandmama ? there is nobody here but Miriam.”

“Yes, they told me he was dead, and his pale-faced wife too, and that they had left a girl whom I must take and bring up. I said I should never love her ; and I never have—never.” Miriam saw that Mrs Sedley was wandering ; alarmed, she sprang to the bell and rang it violently. The old lady turned her head, and Miriam saw her face white and rigid, as Martha came in.

“Better fetch Mr Groves, Martha : I fear grandmama is very ill,” said Miriam.

“Of no use now,” replied the servant, as Mrs Sedley’s head sunk back on the pillow in the fixity of death.

Let us close the red curtains round that tenantless clay, and shut up the Oriel chamber, for to-night at least.

## CHAPTER III.

## ALONE.

MIRIAM followed Martha downstairs to the room which, as a child, had been a favoured resort of hers. The old servant, with thoughtful kindness, pushed her own cushioned chair up to the hearth, and stirred the fire into a blaze. She did not, as many under the circumstances would have done, weary Miriam with condolences : in Martha's opinion it was a "blessed release" for all parties, and she was too straightforward to feign a sorrow she did not feel ; though, at the same time, she would have shrunk from outraging the ties of blood, by commenting bitterly on the failings of a relative, who had certainly never caused Miriam to utter a word of complaint.

As for Miriam herself, she sat turning over in her mind the new phase of existence so suddenly opened before her. She had not been used to contemplate the arrival of this natural event, and she was inexpressibly shocked and grieved at the manner of it, and at the sentiments her grandmother had expressed with her last breath. Had her conscience reproached her with unkindness or inattention, her feelings would have been bitter indeed. But such was not the case: she had been more sinned against than sinning. That she was now utterly alone in the world, unconnected by tie of blood with any of the great human family, did not bring to her a feeling of desolation; as it might have done to one who had lived in love and kind fellowship with her kindred. She had accustomed herself to be uncared for.

There was a change, however, which was inevitable; and this was assuredly painful. She must leave Old Court. Dull as the Oriel Room had often been, melancholy as was the whole train of its associations, still it was the visible record of the past:—it was a home. To stay,

however, depended not on herself : neither her age nor her circumstances fitted her to be the recipient of charity. She only wondered how long the trustees of the charity might grant her, before she was compelled to make way for a new inmate. It was now holiday time, and Miriam's musical labours were remitted for a few weeks. By this leisure she profited.

Mrs Sedley was buried at St Grim's, on the fifth day from her death, and notice was sent in to Miriam to vacate the Oriel room during the course of the ensuing January. When an unpleasant necessity stared her in the face, she was not the one to mourn over it and stand idle. She had not a single friend, to help or interfere, but Martha ; so she resolved to effect her change of quarters at once, whilst her unoccupied time permitted her to make arrangements with some degree of comfort. Mrs Sedley having left no will, the personal property reverted to her granddaughter ; and all the furniture of the Oriel chamber was removed to Miriam's new dwelling in the suburbs. She took two rooms, unfurnished, in a respectable street, where each

house had a little garden attached, and where the air was fresh, and not loaded perpetually with smoke. It had also another advantage, which Miriam had not overlooked in its selection; it was much nearer to that part of the town where her principal pupils resided:—but it was quite out of the way of the old watchmaker's. Poor man! he missed his early morning greeting from Miriam sadly.

The hurry and bustle consequent on Mrs Sedley's death, and her own change of abode, for a while prevented Miriam from resting so much on the image of Philip Warburton; but that once over, and finally settled in her solitary home, she had leisure to look back on the last few weeks, and think that he might have seen her during her trouble, if he would. Then came the reflection, that perhaps he was in London, and did not know of the event which had occurred; but, unfortunately for this consolatory idea, the first day she went out in her new, deep mourning, she saw him in the distance, with Maude Talbot, as before. This time, however, she did not follow them, but turned down a narrow street, and so avoid-

ed another meeting without a recognition. This incident cut short her projected walk : she immediately found the day was less bright and pleasant than she imagined, and returned home to her fireside musings.

She might have remained thus for the space of half an hour, when a ring at the doorbell, and a succession of footsteps on the stairs, startled her from her meditations. Mrs Crofts, the landlady, opened the door, and announced visitors. Miriam rose, expecting to see some of the Simpsons, who had threatened an invasion of her territory, now that she was domiciled in a civilized quarter of the town : for they were lady-like steps—not the firm tread of Philip Warburton, which she longed, yet trembled, to hear. Miriam was not a person to be easily flurried, but the entrance of Miss Talbot and a little girl, for a moment completely disconcerted her. Mrs Crofts, however, good, bustling woman, covered this confusion by her officious hurry in placing chairs near the fire ; and by the time the door closed on the retreating landlady, Miriam was completely herself.

I have said before that Miriam Sedley was not a demonstrative person: indeed her manners, but for a certain quiet dignity which bespoke the gentlewoman, would have been the very opposite of prepossessing. She sat, slightly bending forward, her eyes fixed enquiringly on the blooming face before her; whilst Miss Talbot, as if for a moment surprised into forgetfulness of her mission, answered the look with one of compassionate kindness. There could be no doubt that the slender little lady clad in deep mourning, was the Miriam Sedley who had been described to her, but she had much the same resemblance to the description Miss Talbot had received, as a fine engraving has to the copy in Indian ink by the hand of a learner. The expecting attitude of Miriam recalled Miss Talbot's thoughts to the business of the hour. She introduced herself and her little sister Lettice, a child of about ten years old, who was very fair and delicate-looking; and timid too, for she never relinquished Miss Talbot's hand all the time she stayed.

“It is on behalf of this very much petted

child, and at my friend Mr Philip Warburton's suggestion, that I have come to you, Miss Sedley ;" said Miss Talbot. Miriam bowed.

"My own old governess, Mrs Powys, is unequal to undertaking the charge of Lettice : may I hope that I shall meet with no insuperable objections on your part to become her successor?" Miriam looked surprised and embarrassed.

"Of course," continued Miss Talbot, "so total a change in your habits of life, the resignation of much of your privacy and independence, cannot be settled in a moment. Excuse my abruptness, but my eagerness to have you for Lettice's governess and my own frequent companion, must plead my excuse."

"Such a complete change demands consideration, Miss Talbot," replied Miriam; "my present pupils cannot be resigned at once—you must kindly allow me a week for reflection."

"Certainly. Mrs Powys will continue with me sometime longer, until your other engagements are disposed of ; if you hold out any hope to me that I may have you at last. Your charge, I flatter myself, will not be a



very arduous one ; for my little Lettice is a gentle, loving thing, and very likely to be spoiled at the Priory, if some sensible person does not come to keep us in order,—so Mr Warburton says at least, does he not, Lettice ? ”

The child laughed merrily in her sister’s face, as she said, “ he loves me too.”

Miss Talbot took her leave shortly after ; leaving Miriam in a very dubious mood. Here was proof conclusive that Philip Warburton had not forgotten her, or ceased to respect her, or else he would not have selected her as the companion of his late ward.

There was much to be said both for and against Miss Talbot’s proposition. Miriam highly valued her independence. She was earning sufficient by her profession to support herself in comfort ; though nothing to lay by in case of sickness, or any other casualty. Her sole dependence in her present way of life was her voice ; her earnings maintained her : the interest of that most uncertain capital. Then she was not dependent on the caprices of an individual : she was free to come and go when and where she would. On the other

hand, at the Priory, as Lettice Talbot's governess, there would be a certain routine, a subordinate position: that position as little disagreeable as a dependent one can be, most probably; but certain to have many annoyances from which her present one was free.

Old Court had presented her only with the rough, dark side of society; at Houghton Priory, she might see some of the glowing colours of its upper surface: now, she was without tie in the world; there she might make herself an interest in two young, warm hearts. She should be able to lay by for a rainy day, living under Miss Talbot's roof; through her, she might also return and end her days in the Oriel Chamber. These and many other such reasons did Miriam Sedley freely acknowledge to herself; but the casting argument she withheld. It was this. At Houghton Priory she should again meet Philip Warburton. The end of the week found her decided to abandon the Misses Simpson, and Mabel Staunton, and all her other old pupils, for the little, fair-faced soft-voiced Lettice Talbot.

## CHAPTER IV.

## PLEASANT PLACES.

WE take our leave now of the gloomy, smoke-curtained town, with all its foul disease, and brutal ignorance, and fearful crime. The passing winter has been a hard season : work scarce, wages low, food dear. The poor have a harder struggle before them yet, in the brighter season that is at hand. Some few scattered cases of the pestilence have occurred, and amongst the bitter curses in men's hearts, stands also a ghastly fear. It is in those crowded lanes and alleys, those squalid chambers, the disease will revel ; not in the broad, healthy thoroughfares where the rich dwell : this the poor know. It is not yet stalking abroad in its gaunt terrible strength, but skulking secretly,

and striking only at intervals. Sometimes the people are inclined to think it is an idle rumour ; when suddenly comes another warning, and the families, huddled together in one close garret, look fearfully round in each other's faces, and mutely ask with their terrified eyes, which shall be the next? Let us leave them :—their cry,—their long piteous cry goes not up to Heaven in vain !

It is quite another scene from that about Old Court :—such perhaps as the Oriel chamber overlooked a century ago. Houghton Priory is of the same date as the central part of the Destitute Gentlewomen's Retreat ; but it is entire, grey, antique, massive, stately. The park is extensive, well wooded, and diversified with gentle slopes ; deer feeding in groups under the trees—old trees, oaks, elms, beeches, with their fresh foliage bright with the May dew. The thick herbage, green as the emerald ; cottages of picturesque forms terminating vistas in the trees ; Houghton Church, with its stately tower and famed peal of bells ; hills stretching away in the distance, with villages peeping out from surround-

ing trees : altogether a pretty picture of a wealthy English home. Nearer the house, the gardens preserve the stiff French fashion in which they were originally laid out : terraces, with stone vases, urns, images, and flights of broad steps with flowery creepers covering the narrow, low, side walls ; alleys arched over with climbing plants, and making a pleasant dusky shade in the hottest noon of summer ; great borders of scented flowers, and fountains with their undraperied nymphs.

Many of these things had been restored by Miss Talbot's father ; but everything had been done with a view to preserve the harmony of the whole : and with considerable success, it must be owned. Within the mansion, all that wealth, taste, and luxury could do, had been done. The collection of pictures, statues, and costly books, was not the work of one age or one individual, but of centuries. During the short space that had elapsed since Maude Talbot had been released from her guardians, the whole had been newly arranged.

There is one room especially that we must bring before the mind's eye. It is long shaped, with a vast Oriel window at the upper end overlooking the Park; there are two other bay windows filled with stained glass, through which shines the sun at setting. A Persian carpet covers the floor, and a great table occupies the centre of the apartment, which is always littered over with books, old and new, and the periodicals for the month. A handsome piano stands near the Oriel, with piles of music on a table beside it; in one corner is a bureau with a writing-desk in front, a plain inkstand, and a packet of quills; a case of Russia leather, and several quires of bluish paper; a box for correspondence, answered and unanswered; an almanack for the current year; several sticks of red sealing-wax—a memorandum book locked; a clergy list, peerage, and directory; several works on agriculture—two or three on church architecture and a file of papers.

In the bureau are an infinite number of drawers, secret and others; in these lie, in most

exact order, tied and labelled, the settled accounts, letters, and copies of deeds, which were given up to Maude at her own desire, when her estates passed entirely into her own hands. Her man of business thought she gave herself unnecessary trouble in inspecting and arranging the mass of private papers left by her father; but he was too wise a man to interfere with so excellent a client, in a way likely to be disagreeable to her; so she had her own way, and fancied she did an immense amount of good in overlooking periodically her most difficult and involved accounts. Mr Rawson thought she would soon tire of it; but Maude, in her business corner, imagined she was performing a duty, and even during her earliest and gayest years, gave a certain portion of every week to this unenticing occupation.

A heavy chair stands opposite the writing-table, and a waste basket beside it. Between the painted windows is a console, supporting a handsome inlaid clock; above it hangs a portrait of one of the ladies of the Talbot family in the seventeenth century. Very fair and very beautiful she looks in her court

costume of glittering satin and gems ! Maude has a special fondness for her namesake. Over the chimney is a portrait of Miss Talbot's mother, taken shortly after her marriage ; there is more likeness in it to the delicate Lettice, than to the taller and more brilliant Maude. The draperies of the windows are crimson, and the covers of the low chairs and couches are of the same rich hue.

There is a clear fire burning in the grate, for the season is still chill. In the Oriel window are Maude, Miriam, and Lettice. Maude lies back on a couch, her eyes half closed, a book in one hand, the other toying with the silky ears of a spaniel that lies curled-up on a cushion beside her ; while Miriam, with a piece of embroidery before her, glances often across to where she sits, thinking how very beautiful she is.

And Miriam is not wrong. The slender, rounded, gracile shape ; the white bosom half veiled by a fall of rich lace ; the stately neck, rather proud perhaps in its arched movements ; the dimpled arms, lazily hang-



ing downwards; the perfect oval of her face; the nose straight, the nostril fine; the curved upper, and full lower lip; the broad colourless brow; deep blue eyes, with thickly fringed lids; the pure rose tint on her cheek, and the abundant golden brown hair, falling in a shower of ringlets over her shoulders; with over all the glow and warmth of youth, and the contented smile of happiness. Little Lettice, sitting on a low stool at her feet, bending over a new picture-book, looks like a pale lily beside the eastern rose; and Miriam, poor faded Miriam, has no fitting representative but in the grey lichen on the stems of stately trees.

What are Maude Talbot's thoughts? Very pleasant, dreamy, fanciful, no doubt. There is no trace of painful experience, no looking back upon the past, shadowed in her calmly smiling face; and all in her mind's visionary future is bright and unobscured. Miriam looks at her wonderingly, and reads in her speaking countenance, more perhaps than any other would, of quiet, unalloyed, satisfied happiness. Miriam compares her own lot, grey, colour-

less, as it has been, and is, with the dawn of the radiant girl before her. It is a deep study to find out how happiness and misery are portioned as they are : to every heart its own sorrow and secret bitterness,—to most, we will hope, the joy with which none intermeddle.

Miriam's needle is often arrested ; she does not weary of the silent hour, Maude's dreaminess, or little Lettice's absorbed attention in her new book. She is content to sit by forgotten ; a watcher of others :—a prophetic watcher often. It is an hour favourable to meditation ; the twilight is coming on ; the distance over the trees seems floating in a white mist ; there has been little sun all day, and now the gathering clouds bode rain ; there is an ominous rattle in the freshly-clothed boughs of the trees—a sobbing and sighing of the wind that rises fitfully. Within, the fire gives out a ruddy glow and a pleasant heat. Lettice has looked her book through, and strained her eyes sadly in the waning light, that she might finish it ; so now she lays it on the floor beside her, and rests her head against her sister's knee. Maude

transfers her caressing hand from the spaniel's silky ears, to Lettice's soft curls, which she strokes down with the most loving and gentle touch imaginable. Miriam's embroidery lies neglected on the table beside her, and she has sunk back in her chair, so that the heavy window curtain shadows her; and she watches the two sisters with a softened eye, meantime forgotten by them as much as if her existence were of no importance to either.

There is a pause in the mournful wailing of the wind. Miriam thinks the stillness almost oppressive, for the room is growing dark; objects are undistinguishable twenty yards from the house; but nobody moves. Maude's dreamy fit holds her a long time tonight. — It seems to Miriam, that as the twilight deepens, her face loses its calmly-joyous expression, and is grave—proud—almost stern. It may be only a shadow from the window on her brow:—it may be;—but is it? or the reflection of some new-born thought? she cannot tell.

There it comes! it has threatened long; now down pours the rain, driving violently against

the glass of the windows, and bursting on the silence with startling suddenness.

Floss jumps down from the couch with a short, cross bark, angry at having his slumber so unceremoniously interrupted; Lettice springs to her feet, and trips up to the fire; Maude rises with a start and a sigh, and after looking a minute at the streaming panes, crosses the room to the piano; Miriam gathers up her embroidery and its belongings, and retreats to her special seat by the fire,—Floss following with the staid propriety of an individual labouring under a recent injury. The little dog is the only one who resettles himself comfortably; after turning round thrice,—“in the hope,” said Lettice, “of catching his own tail,”—he lies down on the rug, exactly in front of the fire, and composes himself to finish his broken nap.

The door opens,—“Miss Lettice!—” said a voice at the door. The child jumped up, kissed Miriam, and ran to her sister. There she seemed disposed to linger, but Maude returned her kiss and good night rather hastily: the child seemed surprised, and

went slowly towards the door, looking back once. She went out, and the door was shut. Ah, Maude! that is a tender little heart, shrinking even from the shadow of slight:—guard it well! Remember who, with her last breath, bade you love it, and be gentle to it for her sake, who left you two in the world alone. Remember it Maude, it is a sacred trust.”

Maude ran her fingers over the keys, and then began to play a plaintive air, and to sing in a subdued voice,—rather as if singing to some inward ear than to any outward sense;—singing the echoes of her own wayward thoughts. She had a very sweet and highly-cultivated voice,—but now there was more than sweetness or science;—there was the pathetic thrill which comes from the *felt thought*—the idea understood and responded to. Miriam was glad there was no one to see her, for her eyes overflowed as she listened.

Presently the door was flung wide open, and an elderly, white-headed man-servant announced that tea was ready in the drawing-room. Maude sprung up with a laugh

at her forgetfulness of the lateness of the hour. Miriam hastily passed her handkerchief before her face, and the two ladies walked down the broad staircase to the drawing-room. The brilliant lights, coming from the dark Oriel room, dazzled their eyes as they entered; but in a few seconds they had recovered, and were seated opposite to each other with a cup of tea before them, disposed to be more conversible than either had been before that evening.

“Miss Sedley, if I did not understand the feminine nature better, I should suppose you to be of a very incurious disposition. You never ask me any questions of my former sayings and doings:—you seem utterly indifferent to my birth, parentage, and education. I suppose you take it for granted, that as I am here, I must have owned a mama and papa, and that for all the rest you consider Mr Warburton sufficient warrant? If you please, my dear Miriam, do manifest a little human frailty, that I may not tremble in your presence at the enormity of all my sins, obvious and unconfessed. I long to make

a friend of you. Do let some weakness come over that grave, placid, little face now and then, else I shall think you are not contented at Houghton, and I shall wish I had left you in your lonely abode, from which I had so much trouble to draw you away."

"You would think very wrongly, Miss Talbot. I am happier now than I have been ever since I was a child as young as Lettice. Believe me, I should be happy, most happy, to learn the particulars of your past life; but I, a stranger, could not intrude into what, for aught I knew, you might be disposed to reserve: a confidence is valueless unless it be spontaneous."

"You are right, Miriam, as you always are, and I am hasty and inconsiderate. Let us draw our chairs to the fire and talk: of past times, shall it be?"

"Nothing could please me better just now."

"Not far back, though:—I never can trust myself amongst the recollections of my spoiled, petted, companionless childhood. It was altogether too happy, too unclouded;—it has

made me wilful and obstinate : but not selfish, I hope,—no, not that.”

“No, Miss Talbot ; I think all your friends will free you from that imputation.”

“I am less sure than you on that point. Mr Warburton does not always seem to think me right ; and I know he considers me self-willed and proud.”

“As your guardian, I suppose he was justified in speaking of your errors of judgment? ”

“As my guardian he was a perfect stranger to me : I never saw him until the occasion when those my father appointed as my guardians met, to celebrate here my coming of age. Papa, from some unaccountable whim, fixed that at eighteen. I cannot account for it in any other way than by fancying he thought me superior to my sex in general. I was fifteen when poor papa died, and as I had until that time had my own way entirely, you may be sure I was not disposed to yield implicit obedience to the behests of two or three gentlemen who were perfect strangers to me. Papa had a great



respect for Mr Warburton, but with him I had no personal interview. Sir James Clare, good, easy man, seemed too frightened at my vehemence to oppose any effectual resistance to my plans. Mrs Powys had been with me since I was six years old; Madame Musart since I was ten; and Aimée since I was a baby. These three I announced it as my intention to keep with me always;—also that I was resolved to abide at Houghton. Of course it was both Sir James's wish and that of his colleague that I should reside at Clare Hall until I was entirely emancipated; but I could not, and I would not resign the liberty I had enjoyed during poor papa's lifetime; and I told them so, in my peculiarly decisive way. Mr Warburton wrote me a letter of remonstrance; Sir James feebly resisted, but to no purpose. Mr Warburton interfered no more in my affairs—probably having too much on his hands already to undertake the charge of a headstrong girl. Finally, Sir James and I compromised the matter: I was to remain at Houghton nine months each year, and spend the remaining three at Clare

Hall, with my body-guard, Mrs Powys, Madame Musart, Aimée, and little Lettice."

"It must have been an agreeable change, I should think."

"Very far from it, indeed. The first time it was not very oppressive,—the second it was tedious,—the last it was insupportable. Mrs Powys did not go,—she visited her friends in the south; and I missed her—kind, motherly soul—exceedingly. You know that I am Lettice's guardian now, do you not?—I am united with Sir James and Mr Warburton in that office.—Well, Lady Clare besought me to leave her with them. She was sure she would be neglected in my many engagements. Of course I refused. I could not bear to be separated from her—the only blood relation I have in the world—my pretty little sister. When it was mentioned, Aimée raved in the most frantic way; she was sure she would be moped to death; she had better be put into a convent at once. Madame was more reasonable upon the subject, but I carried the day, spite of Sir James and his dame, and their trio of daughters. Oh! Miriam, what

dragons they are. I could not resist saying and doing things to fright them from their propriety, it was so ludicrous to see the faces of obsequious disapproval with which they heard my sallies. Then their harangues on the duties I owe to my name, my rank, my future wealth and position, were something exquisite: as if I were likely to forget that I am a Talbot!" There was a haughty gesture of the young heiress' head, to accompany the laugh which terminated her speech.

"They are sensible well-meaning people, I believe," said Miriam.

"Oh yes! excellent to talk about, but wearisome to live with. The same formal stately dinner parties day by day, a walk or a ride with one of the dragons in the afternoon; work, letter-writing, or serious conversation in Lady Clare's boudoir in the morning. Madame, like a wise woman as she is, detached herself from the family immediately she discovered their style, and lived in a pleasant little retirement of her own. I assure you, Miriam, I envied her. As for poor Aimée, she grew quite pale, and

neglected her dress :—there were none but sexagenarian serving-men, and it was no use wasting her beauty on them. Lettice had the pleasantest time of all of us. There was a great boy there—a distant connexion of Lady Clare's—Gower was his name ; he patronized her extremely ; the little thing actually cried to leave him. He was not a pretty boy either—strong and powerful, with great, black eyes and a curly pate,—but a fine disposition, Lady Clare assured me, and a pet with all the dragons.”

“ You did right to bring her home again.”

“ I am proud of that triumph, Miriam, I assure you. Lady Clare would make her stately and solemn as one of her own graces,—but we will make her a gentle, obedient, loving little thing,—all that so fair and delicate a woman should be :—she shall know sorrow and care by name only, if I can avert it. Oh Miriam ! you cannot imagine how that motherless child has twined herself round my heart :—she is something more than a sister to me !” For a few minutes

Maude was silent, leaning her cheek on her hand, and gazing thoughtfully into the fire.—

“ I often have a foreboding when I look at her, that all will not go well with her :—does it strike you ?—are you apt to yield to pre-sentiments ? ”

“ Not in her case : there is nothing striking in her yet but her devoted attachment to yourself. ”

“ Poor little thing ! who has she to love beside ? ”

“ How did it happen that Madame Dufour left you ? ” asked Miriam, after a long pause.

“ She was home-sick :—she had not been in France for eight years. It was a very sudden thing seemingly : it struck her one morning in autumn, when everything was glowing under a harvest sun. I said something in admiration of the view from the Oriel in my room ; she looked up suddenly at the deep blue sky, the changing foliage, and the yellow waving corn. It was that view, no doubt, and the many happy reminiscences of her own home,—for she told me that evening she must leave me ; she must

go :—no reason, but she must go. I saw the home-sickness was on her; so I made no resistance, although I was sorry to lose her; and she went. My next trouble was, Mrs Powys fell ill. She has never thoroughly recovered, and she announced her intention of resigning her office after I was installed sole lady and mistress at Houghton. This I did resist with might and main ;—hour by hour, and day by day. Then came my eighteenth birth-day, and the rejoicings attendant thereupon ;—my introduction to the very popular Mr Warburton, and the quiet after the storm. I felt anything but happy on that day, as if I had taken a burden upon my shoulders I was unqualified to bear. Then my search after you, at Mr Warburton's instigation,—Mrs Powys' retreat to Old Court,—your arrival ;—and that brings us down to the present time. Of the gay balls, parties, and such like matters, I shall say nothing now: you will see by and by; for I shall insist on taking Lettice to town next month, and you will not forsake her, I am sure."

"What a pity that fashion makes it impera-

tive to leave the country while it is most beautiful. Do you not wish that your gay campaign could be transferred to the winter months?"

"I think not: I imagine the Christmas gatherings in great country-houses wonderfully pleasant. Houghton was a cheerful home when mama was alive. We lived abroad principally after that; but I can remember yet our winter amusements. Houghton must not degenerate under my reign. There is plenty of society in the neighbourhood, both of gentle blood and wealthy parvenus. Mr Warburton's place is scarcely five miles from us, and there are the Cecils, and Darwins, and Sykes, and a host of others. There is no dearth of young people hereabouts, as there is in some places: it would be easy at any time to call a pleasant party together. Mr Warburton, though not a man of family, is a great favourite, and in the way of amusement, he is a host in himself. But I forgot, you probably know him better than I do myself."

"No—ours was only a childish acquaintance: it is more than ten years since we have met; but I can imagine him very agreeable."

“ He is more than that,—he is fascinating. I pardoned his neglect of his wilful ward, when Sir James Clare explained to me that he was that most wretched and tormented being, a popular member. Once at a public meeting, to which I was conveyed sorely against my will, I heard him speak ; being at the time ignorant that he was my much depreciated guardian. I was greatly impressed by his manner,—neither diffident nor pretentious, but earnest and truthful ; giving one the idea that he was thorough master of his subject, and energetically bent on putting it forward in its best light. His face certainly aided his tongue with the fairer portion of the audience, and perhaps it was not without its effect on the other sex ; it looked remarkably collected and handsome amongst the flushed and haggard faces of others on the platform. He was defeated and talked down by that fierce demagogue Rawlings ; but there was a far nobler look about him in his defeat, than in his opponent in victory : the way in which he saluted Rawlings, who was not sparing of personal invective, as they passed each other



in resuming their seats, was something exquisite. I asked Lady Clare who he was; and when told how intimately he was connected with my own affairs, I felt no little regret at the cavalier manner in which I had rejected his interference in my schemes, during my short period of wardship. However, I was not destined to make his acquaintance during that year: my petulance had its reward. I indemnified myself, nevertheless, by reading the debates whenever his name appeared in the papers; though the manner and gesture, which are half the oration, could not be conveyed by the inanimate print."

"I am glad to know that my foresight has not failed me in his case," said Miriam. "I always felt that Philip Warburton was no common character. I am glad to know that he is working his way onward and upward with a quiet untiring energy that cannot fail of its recompense; that he is working, too, heart and soul, in the good cause,—the amelioration of the condition of the people. Such men are rare; and unhappily there is much labour for those few to do."

“ They are useful ; but they have not the prestige of the old nobility.”

“ You are a true aristocrat, Miss Talbot : such extreme notions are out of date. Mr Warburton is a man of the times, and for the times.”

“ Of Mr Warburton personally, I have the very highest opinion. I intend to make him serviceable in various ways, now I am mistress of Houghton. I mean to try what even one woman, with the means at command, and the will to use them, can do in bettering the condition of that section of the poor who come under her observation. The greater part of the district round Old Court is still in my hands, and I am told that nothing—nothing can exceed the wretchedness that prevails there. Round Houghton everything is in perfect order : nothing offensive to eye or ear ; but in the outlying hamlets amongst the hills, it is a different thing. Mr Warburton I count on as an invaluable auxiliary in all my plans for improvement. The Manor, his place, is a model of a well-managed community, I am told : I have not seen it. I promised to defer my visit until

his return from London, when I shall take a series of rides to view the country, not artistically, but from a business point of view."

"You could not have selected a better companion," said Miriam.

"Women generally seem to think that when they have pitied and sympathized with the suffering, then their mission ends. I trust that I shall not have dedicated that corner in my room to business in vain, but that I shall be able to do some good in my generation. They say the distress in the town is frightful, both from want and sickness.

There is no doubt of it. "This terrible cholera makes great ravages amongst the very poor, who live crowded together more like animals than human beings. Often in my walks to and from Old Court, I used to see shivering half-clad groups at the street corners, discussing, as angry and hungered men always will discuss, the doings of those over them ; cursing, bitterly and passionately, those who bade them be patient and conform to circumstances—when, in nine cases out of ten probably, those circumstances were death

from privation, or crime for a livelihood. I, Miss Talbot, was one of those who could pity and not relieve : indeed no temporary relief would avail them ; and I pitied them accordingly."

Maude was silent. From personal observation she could not speak ; for as yet she had seen and done nothing amongst her poor. I say "*her poor*," because they lived under her, as her tenants ; but the main cause of their troubles was beyond her authority.

The man who had been in the habit of collecting the weekly rents of the streets, courts, and alleys, which in their dire poverty had a Talbot for a landlady, had assured her that their condition of repair was perfect ; that they were as well ventilated as similar places in every other great manufacturing town, and not more densely populated. This might be true, and probably was so ; but those said courts, lanes, and alleys, were nevertheless flourishing hot-beds of every disease which needs a foul atmosphere for its fruition. Maude thought of making a personal inspection ; but this idea her agent

opposed, as utterly absurd and dangerous. Mr Warburton also assured her that no change, to be effectual, could be immediate; and represented to her the propriety of providing other dwellings, before dislodging the people from their present sties. To this reasonable counsel Maude hearkened, and there the matter ended for that time.

This was not the first conversation Miriam Sedley and Maude Talbot had had on the subject, and the former resolved that it should not be the last. She feared, and not without some foundation, that the beautiful and courted heiress, in the midst of her enjoyments and triumphs, might suffer those neglected tenants to slip out of her mind. She also shrewdly suspected that one absorbing passion was possessing itself of her heart; but of this last she was not certain: she must watch. Poor Miriam! She had voluntarily placed herself within reach of many a pang.

Maude Talbot was not without a taste for magnificence and display. Her establishment at Houghton was settled on a most liberal

plan, and the new decorating and furnishing of the reception-rooms at the Priory, had been a nine days' wonder amongst the gentry who had witnessed their splendour at Maude's birthday fête. The picture-gallery, with its costly and well-chosen collection of pictures, both modern and old; the statuary; the new ball-room, with its walls of white and crimson and gold; the magnificent chandeliers of crystal; the Houghton library of stately proportions, renowned far and near for its precious manuscripts, for thousands of volumes of ancient and modern literature, and its foreign collection; with its old librarian Cyrus Evelyn, who had been there as amanuensis and secretary to the last Earl Talbot, Maude's great uncle, and who still remained firmly grafted in the vast apartment, evidently thinking it more his domain than that of the Lady of Houghton; the three drawing-rooms, the dining-rooms, the state bed-chambers, where more than one royal personage had slept; the double halls, rich in old armour, and statuary and pictures; the grand staircase, with balustrades of

veined marble, and windows of rich stained glass; the conservatories opening from the ball-room, which again adjoined the crimson drawing-room;—all these things gave the guests subject-matter of admiration and discussion for many a day. Then the rent-roll was rated at an enormous figure; and the Talbot diamonds were amongst the finest in England.

Above all, the mistress of all this profusion and splendour was undeniably and unmistakeably beautiful; she was reputed generous, amiable, talented, and accomplished: nobody chose to discern a spirit of pride or ostentation in anything so wealthy and charming a young lady did; and youths and maidens, old squires and gentle dames, pronounced Maude Talbot of Houghton the most admirable of neighbours, the most lovely of heiresses. Younger sons eyed her covetously: in their estimation she would have been beautiful if undowered; for younger sons generally have a weakness for pretty, portionless nymphs. Titled men of decayed fortunes thought how amply those rich old church-lands would support their ancient dig-

nities, and watched to see how far the heiress was to be influenced by sounding names.

Many, after that great fête at Houghton, went home to sleepless pillows, to scheme for the possession of the damsel of the Priory ; who was as much the object of ambition as the most exacting of fair ladies could desire. Not one had been distinguished above another ; there was no room for speculation or envious tirade ; nobody either had cause to complain : Maude was universally courteous. Old snuffy Mrs Dobbs, the hunting squire of Eversleigh's amply-daughtered wife, was as graciously received as the magnificent Countess of Craven ; and little Cornet Lapp thought he had as good a chance for her favour as the six-foot black-moustached colonel of dragoons who was the secret object of his envy and imitation. Somebody—a very censorious and spiteful tabby with a host of unmarried daughters—did say that Miss Maude Talbot lent her ear most frequently to her grave middle-aged guardian, Mr Warburton, more frequently than was proper ; but the whisper obtained no credence whatever :



and many of the unattached gentlemen who had made her acquaintance on her eighteenth birth-night, went away to their several domiciles in the full persuasion that there was a fair field before them, and a very precious stake to be won by the boldest amongst them.

That Maude was sensible of this general fever of admiration, is undeniable ; but that she was indifferent to it, is not so certain. She wished to be popular, and was delighted to see with how little effort she was so. To keep it up, she accepted the eagerly-offered hospitalities of the neighbourhood with infinite cordiality ; and in the few instances where she wished the acquaintance to be distant, she made her very refusals gracious and acceptable. She was not long in becoming sensible of the prestige that attended her as mistress of Houghton, and of the high consideration in which she was held for her personal qualities. She was in a fair way to be spoiled by the adulation and subservience that met her at every turn :—a woman of less pride and weaker judgment would have been so ; but as yet Maude Talbot remained uninjured by the

worldly alloy which surrounded her. She was born to her position, and its splendour did not dazzle her.

Of all those about her, Miriam Sedley alone truly estimated the strength and vehemence of that pride which had for centuries been the striking and prominent characteristic of her haughty race,—for Miriam alone, perhaps, was unprejudiced by interest: she could sit by and observe what others in their ardour of admiration had neither time nor inclination to discern.

## CHAPTER V.

### A COUNTRY RIDE.

“LUPA and Mr Warburton! Lupa and Mr Warburton!” exclaimed Lettice Talbot on the morning of the first of May, dancing round old Cyrus Evelyn’s library-chair, and then dashing off to a window at the upper end of the room which overlooked the main entrance, to see the visitor dismount. Mr Evelyn raised his grey head and pushed his spectacles up on his wrinkled forehead, at this sudden flight of his usually quiet little companion.

“What is the matter, Miss Lettice? Take care, and don’t fall out of the window,” said the old man, getting up and walking slowly to where she stood leaning over the low sill of the open window, with her head out and her

light hair streaming on the breeze. Just as he reached her the dog gave a joyful bark of recognition, and Mr Warburton looked up.

“Well, my pretty mayflower, are you so glad to see us back?” said he, smilingly. “How do you do, Mr Evelyn, this glorious morning? You should take a page out of Nature’s book to-day, instead of remaining poring over your musty manuscripts. Come down, Lettice; Lupa is half frantic with joy at the sight of his pet companion: come down and have a ride on his back.”

“Yes! yes! Lupa, I am coming. Good bye, Mr Evelyn, I will come again soon;” and away went the child, dancing and tripping, and singing like a wild-bird, down the great staircase, whilst Cyrus Evelyn went back to his littered table and deep leather chair, calling her, in his feeble voice, “a pretty thing, a wee pretty thing.”

Mr Warburton had just entered the hall with Lupa at his heels, as Lettice appeared; the huge dog bounded forward and gambolled round her, whilst she reached out her hand to grasp his collar. For some minutes he would

not permit himself to be caught, but, after rushing two or three times across the hall with the child after him, he condescended to allow her to lead him into the drawing-room, whither his master had preceded him. There was another small disturbance as they entered the apartment, for Floss, who was as jealous as little dog could be, jumped down from the couch beside Maude and rushed forward to repel the canine intruder. Lupa glanced down at the tiny animal with dignified scorn, stepped over him, and took up his quarters at Maude's feet, resting his great black muzzle on her knee. Lettice crouched down on a stool close by, twining her fingers amongst his thick, curly, black hair; whilst Floss, seeing his indignation unlikely to have the desired effect, retreated in high dudgeon, and concealed himself amongst the folds of the window-curtains behind Miriam Sedley's chair.

Floss himself was not more discomposed by these early visitors than was Miriam. The first tone of Philip Warburton's well-remembered voice sent the blood to her face, and the next drove it back violently to her

heart, leaving her paler even than usual. Fortunately, the noise of the dogs and his greeting of Maude Talbot, prevented Mr Warburton from observing her emotion; and by the time his attention was directed to her, she had recovered so far as to be diligently pursuing her embroidery, with a faint flush on her cheek. Mr Warburton grasped her hand cordially, made two or three allusions to the days at Old Court when they were children; hoped her health would be benefited by a residence in the country, and then turned to converse with the younger lady: evidently forgetting, in the space of five minutes, that such a person as Miriam Sedley existed on the face of the earth.

Maude Talbot was looking exquisitely beautiful. The surprise had called up a soft, transparent bloom to her cheek, and there was a tremulous agitation in her manner, for which Miriam knew there could be but one cause; for she had never seen it until now. Philip Warburton probably saw it no less, for there was something more than the mere friendliness of the guardian in his manner to

Maude. He treated her with the gentle condescending tenderness which a very superior man might use towards a wayward but loving child. Maude seemed to feel this too, for after a while she drew up her gracile form, with a haughty gesture peculiar to her; raised her eyes to Mr Warburton's face, and asked him, with an *insouciant* air, when he returned to London. There was a peculiar smile about Philip's mouth as he replied that he hoped to be free to return by the tenth. Miriam left the room unobserved.

"But, Miss Talbot," he continued quietly, "I am anticipating your long-promised ride to the Manor, to Eversleigh, and some of those scattered hamlets on the hills. I was in hopes, indeed, that this fair May morning might tempt you out with me at once."

Maude looked out at the cloudless sky; she wished to have some plea for refusal: some vague feminine coquetry, I suspect, was at work in her heart; but there was no likelihood of rain, and she had not any engagement to plead. Philip Warburton read it all in her changing cheek, and, with consum-

mate knowledge of the working of that true woman's nature, forbore to press the request. As her inclinations were on his side, he knew she would yield at length, and he changed the subject.

"Miss Sedley is more altered than I could have imagined it possible for her to be in so few years: she looks quite the middle-aged woman," said he.

"She is a nice, good creature," interrupted Lettice, who had attached herself with no common degree of affection to the grave lady whom her sister had provided for her governess.

"That is right, Lettice; speak up boldly for your friends, absent or present," said Mr Warburton, drawing his chair nearer to the couch, and stroking the child's glossy hair caressingly.

Maude looked out at the window, first at the clear sky, then at the fresh green of the trees and the misty haze still hanging over the distant hills. Philip Warburton saw, without seeming to see; but he spoke not yet. Maude stood, leaning against the side of the window, her face turned away from



him; but he could see that the rose-tint deepened on her cheek, for she felt herself watched; and that hidden emotion was peculiarly sweet to Philip Warburton: it was a sign for which he had been looking eagerly.

“Tired, Lupa, already,” exclaimed Lettice, as the great dog got up and stretched himself with a terrific yawn.

“He is wondering why you do not go and play with him on the lawn,” answered Mr Warburton.

“Come, Lupa, come!” and away went the child with the dog bounding after her, across the Hall, and down the flight of steps to the grassy slope fronting the windows.

“If I am to be your companion this morning, Mr Warburton, I must beg you to excuse me for a few minutes,” said Maude, suddenly turning from the window, with a slight assumption of dignity in her manner; and she passed out of the room.

When the door had closed after her, Philip Warburton went to the place where she had stood, his countenance somewhat less satisfied than it had looked before. Though Lettice

and Lupa were in the height of their gambols just before him, he saw neither of them, but only the troublesome doubts which that half-proud, half-shy look of Maude's had aroused.

There was one secret of her disposition which was not yet opened to him, of which he began, however, to get glimpses now and then ; and these intervenings of shadow by no means conduced to his peace of mind. Philip Warburton was not a man to yield an attainable blessing without straining every nerve for its acquirement ; therefore, though these doubts troubled, they did not deter him. He had set his happiness on Maude's love—not rashly, and scarcely I think presumptuously.

True, he was her senior by thirteen years ; his family was respectable, and nothing more : but he was a man of known and acknowledged ability ; one for whom many predicted and hoped a high and successful career. His grandfather, who had grown wealthy by trade, had purchased the manor ; his father had filled his station, as member for the county, with honour to himself and benefit

to his constituents; and Philip Warburton was following in his steps. His estate was large, well managed, and quite unencumbered; his income between ten and twelve thousand a year. No despicable mate even for Maude Talbot, it may be thought. By and by, we shall have the young beauty's own opinion on the matter.

However, Philip Warburton had, as I have said, chosen to set his fate on this girl's decision; and the slightest change in her demeanour sensibly affected him. Perhaps some may pronounce him foolish at his years, after the first flush of youth was passed, to venture so much on any woman's favour. I can only plead that at thirty-one, men's hearts may be stronger, but not the less open to the influence of love; and that Philip Warburton, not having suffered any disappointment before—never, indeed, having been the slave of the master passion—only succumbed the more completely and readily, when the graceful and beautiful Maude Talbot came across his path. A thousand times he had reckoned over to himself the chances for and against his

suit: the disparity of years was nothing, in his estimation; he was still a young man, and a man of mark; his fortune was ample, his connexions good. He determined to bide his time; and he laid up her image in his heart.

Not one of those who attended the birthday fête at Houghton Priory, had the most distant idea of the hopes which were rooting themselves firmly in Philip Warburton's breast; therefore the maidens approaching the ominous "corner," and the matrons with marketable daughters, looked on him with a covetously affectionate glance. It was a mystery why he had remained unmarried so long; and not a few secretly wished that old Mrs Warburton would either die, or else make herself so disagreeable at the Manor, that her son might be induced to supersede her by bringing in a young wife. But it was Philip Warburton's ambition to be loved, not for his acres and fine establishment, but for his own intrinsic worth; and he had, through some free-masonry which I cannot undertake to explain, got an idea into his head, that his neglected ward appre-

ciated him better than any other lady of his acquaintance; and that the slight blush, and rarely lifted eye, betrayed an emotion which she was not used to feel, and consequently flattering to himself.

So far Philip Warburton was not wrong. He had made himself an interest in Maude Talbot's heart; he did stand more in her thoughts than any other: her cheek had a trick of reddening under his glance, and the girl had begun to ask herself why. That was the secret of Maude's haughty little gesture as she left the room to prepare for her ride, and which held Philip Warburton in unpleasant cogitation until she returned.

Every trace of haughtiness had vanished when she reappeared, and, smiling brightly, told Mr Warburton that she was ready. He rose immediately and followed her from the room, the doubts which had risen in his mind completely dispelled by her pleasant face. He raised her to her saddle, mounted himself, whistled to Lupa, waved his hand to Lettice, and away the two cantered over the grassy slopes of the park, still

sparkling and wet with dew. At the park gate they drew rein, and rode more leisurely on the hard road beyond. Maude's pony was impatient, and gave her some little trouble at first; but being an expert and steady horse-woman, she shewed no sign of fear, and laughed at Mr Warburton's begging her to return and exchange the young thing she rode for Tressy, her old pony.

"I am not in the least alarmed. Saladin feels the enlivening spirit of the morning, even as I do myself: besides, poor Tressy, as steady as old Time, and as leaden-paced too, often, would not keep up with your horse. What has made you so cowardly all at once, Mr Warburton?" she said, turning her face full upon him.

Philip Warburton, for a self-possessed person, was wonderfully startled by that plain question; and for a second or so, he suffered more of his real feeling to find its way from his marvellously clear, expressive eyes, than at that season he had intended to do. Maude interpreted it so correctly, that though her question remained un-

answered, she did not think it necessary to repeat it; she discovered immediately some object worthy of note which compelled her to turn her face from her companion entirely for several minutes, and for the study of which absolute silence was indispensable. Mr Warburton rode on by her side patiently enough, for a length of time, but at last there was a choice of roads; one the high road, the other through the woods that skirted the Houghton estates on the west, and Mr Warburton asked Maude which she would prefer.

“The wood-ride; it is always pleasant there,” replied she, riding forward. There was a great chirping of birds overhead, when they had got in a short way, and the green shade was deliciously cool and refreshing after the glaring white road they had left. Now and then the hares and rabbits rushed away through the underwood, and the sights and sounds were all those of fresh and unpolluted nature: very different from the scenes about Old Court, little more than eight miles away.

“How is it, Mr Warburton, that in a place

like this, visions of the dark, wretched town-dwellings of the poor always rise up before my mind's eye to destroy my enjoyment? It must be that I have made no effort yet to raise my miserable tenants out of their distress," said Maude.

"You have not forgotten them; but the work you meditate is not the work of a day, or of a year. There the ignorance and crime are so rooted in, that I doubt this generation will not see them destroyed: begin where you have prospect of success, and where you make no enemies by doing good."

"Is it possible that any one can look disapprovingly on efforts to elevate those poor creatures?"

"It is not only possible, but it is an undeniable fact. There are thousands who would leave them in their brutal ignorance, as being the mental state best suited to those who do the hard labour of the earth. The manufacturing populations generally are superior to their agricultural brethren in acuteness, and also in knavery; but we must bear in mind that theirs is the sharpness of constant association



with the cast-offs of society, the club-room, one-sided oratory; not the discernment of an opened mind, which has been trained and educated duly. There is a keenness and an intelligence about the face of an artisan, that you rarely see amongst the field-labourers; but it is oftener the keenness of bitter experience, and angry resistance against what he deems an unequal fate, than the reflection of a higher mind. Those men have been educated by circumstances; and assuredly no schoolmaster does his work so thoroughly: unhappy men, that, instead of guiding and profiting by circumstances, they must blindly yield to their force, and bend to or even be broken by them. For the generation that is passing, not much in the way of improvement is to be done; but it will be a dangerous thing for those who come after, if the children who are rising up are left in as dire ignorance and deeper want than their fathers before them."

"But, Miss Talbot, it is not of these thousands in great cities I wished to speak to you, but of a place nearer home; a pretty country place enough, about two miles up the hills

beyond Eversleigh : a hamlet of your own, too ; but so retired and hid away amongst hills and trees, that the time seems to have passed it by, and almost forgotten its existence. There is one person who has, at all events, and that most completely."

" You are speaking of Stanton, are you not, and its absentee clergyman, Mr Theodore Grandiose ? "

" I am. Then you probably know the circumstance to which I was about to call your attention ? "

" Certainly, I have heard much of the neglected state of the people, and of the aversion in which they hold Mr Burr the curate. Papa gave the living to Mr Grandiose, who was a college friend of his, without reflecting how unlikely it was that a man of his tastes and family would choose to live secluded in a little Yorkshire village. The living is a very valuable one I believe, is it not ?—there are two or three villages in the parish."

" Yes, Stanton, Gravells, and Hillside : there is work both for the vicar and two curates ; and but one—and he a pompous,

ignorant, ill-paid man—to do it: or rather to leave it undone. The income of Mr Grandiose is between a thousand and twelve hundred yearly from this living:—how much think you, Miss Talbot, he pays Mr Burr, his substitute?”

“Indeed I cannot guess. Perhaps one hundred.”

“Twenty-five pounds! and a section of the parsonage furnished to live in.”

“Is it possible?”

“It is true. Schools there are none, except one kept by a Methodist preacher about half-way between Hillside and Stanton:—the poor man has a hard time of it, between Mr Burr and his pupils.”

“Then schools there must be. There is a church at Stanton: though I have never been there, I have more than once heard its sweetly-toned bells sounding over the water, when I have been at Eversleigh.”

“A church there is, Miss Talbot, but it needs restoring sadly. In the time of the late vicar, this was to my fancy the prettiest hamlet within twenty miles of the Manor. Dr

Graves was a friend of my mother's, and many pleasant days have I passed at the Parsonage. But all is changed there now : the low public-houses flourish, and the church is empty. An absentee clergyman makes sad work amongst his people : if he neglects his duty, why, they argue, should not they ?”

“The schools shall be built. But how, under such a man as Mr Burr, can they be expected to flourish ?”

“Mr Burr is too prudent a person to act in opposition to the lady of Houghton.”

“I am glad I have not an obstinate man to deal with. I wish Mr Grandiose would return and take up his abode at Stanton : he is a well-meaning man enough.”

“Well-meaning, I grant, but indolent ; and so thoroughly imbued with the pride and prejudices of his class, that he is worse than useless amongst a people like those of Stanton parish. Such men may do well for dignitaries of the Church, but not for parish priests. I do not suppose he ever did a day's work amongst the people yet. If you could see the magnificence of the house where he was

brought up, and the luxury with which he was habitually surrounded, you would comprehend how impossible it must be for such a man to accommodate himself to the society of Stanton and its neighbourhood."

"I blame the individual less than that absurd prejudice which compels the younger branches of noble families to take refuge from destitution in the ranks of the Church; for which, in nine cases out of ten, their early associations, indulgences, and prejudices, render them most unfit. Theodore Grandiose is the fifth of seven sons; he has besides three sisters. The estate goes, of course, to the eldest son, who is a rich man and a powerful in his county: he can lay down a thousand pounds for every hundred his brothers can produce. The two elder sisters have married peers; the youngest, a woman of exquisite beauty, lives with two of her brothers, half-pay army and navy officers, both single men. One brother fell in India; all the rest are living. The eldest is heir-apparent to an earldom, which will double his possessions; the second is an advocate of some repute in Edinburgh, but poor, and having a

large family, in which latter particular Theodore is no way behind him: he has nine children, and his wife, a woman of family and a beauty, brought him no dower, so that, comparatively speaking, he is a poor man. For this reason he resides in a fashionable watering-place, where he and his wife have the benefit of society, and their children of an inexpensive education. They would be moped to death, as Mrs Grandiose told me, were they obliged to live at Stanton; and their circumstances forbid them to resign so valuable a living."

"Mr Grandiose might at least afford the people an efficient substitute."

"He ought: that is what I cannot understand. I can scarcely believe that so underbred a person as Mr Burr could make himself so agreeable to Mr Grandiose, as to induce that gentleman to displace his predecessor to make way for him. There is but one motive I can assign, and that so mean a one, I dare hardly mention it: that Mr Burr was willing to receive a smaller stipend than could support Walton, the former curate, and his young wife."

“ It is impossible to interfere with a clergyman in the execution of his duty ; but I most heartily wish that Mr Grandiose would give up the living in favour of some person who would not consider that his sole business lay in drawing its emoluments.”

“ That, I fear, is very improbable : he was sent into the Church for a living, and having fallen into a pleasant place, he is not the man to cast the bread from his mouth. You can do nothing, Miss Talbot, but try to induce him to supersede Mr Burr by some more reputable person, and establish a school in each village yourself.”

“ Poor Mr Burr ! I do not quite like my office, Mr Warburton.”

“ You do not know the man, or your scruples would vanish. You should speak to Mr Tempest, of Hillside, about him.”

Talk of the ——. You know the rest, reader : They were just emerging from the wood-ride on the open road when Mr Warburton mentioned Mr Tempest, and, with a suddenness rather embarrassing, they saw that individual standing before them. He was a little, fat

man, of an extraordinary rotundity of shape, dressed in a complete suit of shepherd's plaid: his face was large, and of intense jovialty and redness; his hair white as silver, and his eyes light-blue. He raised his hat to Maude, and sprang aside with more agility than, from his appearance, any one would have given him credit. Mr Warburton checked his horse.

"Not going to call on Mr Burr, eh?" said the old gentleman, sharply glancing at Maude.

"We had no intention of doing so to-day," replied Mr Warburton; "the gentleman is no friend of mine."

"Ah! don't like him, eh? Horrid man! Nobody ever heard me call a man a prig, but he is an ass: the man's a fool. That is, he's an idiot,—a born idiot,—a horrid prig! Nobody can say I ever called a man a prig, but he is a prig—a horrid prig. It is a vulgar word; I don't like the word, and I never use it: but the man's a fool, an idiot, an ass, a prig,—a most horrid prig!"

The little man was in danger of apoplexy at this point, having worked himself up into a



violent passion, but Maude turned the conversation.

“ That is a fine dog of yours, Mr Tempest.”

“ Good for nothing, ma'am ; absolutely good for nothing. My gamekeeper tied him up the other day and gave him a good leathering ; he yelped like a mongrel cur. No dog at all, no dog at all ! That Lupa of Warburton's is a handsome fellow, though.”

“ Yes, he is a magnificent creature.”

“ Now, I don't know that : I should not call him a magnificent creature. That kind of dog never did please me much : he has a terribly savage look.”

“ He is no lamb when he is roused,” observed Mr Warburton.

“ Ah, but there is a shy look about him too : I should scarcely think him a match for my Lion.”

“ I should not like to see them fight,” said Maude, laughing.

“ Well, now, I never contradict a lady ; but the bulls in Spain,—now, don't women go to see them fight ? Women are cruel naturally :—I would not say a rude thing for the world—

but I do think, now, that if it were the fashion in England you would go."

"I hope my late ward's feminine softness would overcome her dread of incurring the stigma of want of fashion. I think it would," said Mr Warburton.

"You are the last man in the world I should wish to offend, but I must say that you are wrong there. I don't mean to say that Miss Talbot is—what I mean to say is,—you know,—Ah! well, I wish you good morning,—a very fine morning!" And so having involved himself in a difficulty, by his habit of contradicting everybody, himself included, Mr Tempest bowed himself off, and the two rode on.

The way lay over the brow of a hill which commanded a rich and extensive view of the country. To the west, indicated by the atmosphere of smoke which enveloped it, and the tall chimneys peering out of it, lay the great manufacturing town; a broad river, winding its way through the meadows, and overhanging woods, gleamed like a silver thread in the landscape. Near its banks, bosomed in trees, were many little hamlets, with their

church-spires looking heavenwards. Houghton, Eversleigh, and the Manor were all on the river; and three more picturesque villages it would be impossible to discover.

Looking down from the hill, southward, lay the hamlet of Hillside, through which Maude and Mr Warburton rode. To the latter its peculiarities were familiar enough, but Maude was startled that any such desolate place could exist within five miles of her own home—on her own estate too—unknown to her. The cottages were certainly weather-tight—that was the steward's affair; but instead of trim gardens before the doors, and the crofts behind, were bare patches of land, with very few exceptions, totally neglected. Great manure-heaps, in more instances than one, encroached on the village streets; the palings were decayed and broken, the windows patched; and streams of foul water trickled in kennels at either side of the way.

There were numbers of children of every age, from two to fourteen, playing and rioting in the road; their mothers sitting at the open doors, or else gathered in groups of twos

and threes, to grumble and murmur at their miserable condition. At the further end of the village was a row of mud hovels. It needed not Mr Warburton's explanation to assure Maude that this was an Irish colony ; its peculiar and unfragrant medley of manure-heaps, pigs, and children, testified that beyond a doubt.

“ And these poor creatures are tenants of mine,” said Maude, as they turned down the road to Stanton. “ How is it they are so different from the people at Houghton ? ”

“ One great cause may be, that having no Squire living in the midst of them to compel a reformation in their disgusting methods of existence, they degenerate into indolence. These Irish invaders, who settled here in your father's time, have not improved the reputation of the place : no one who can get a cottage at Stanton, comes to Hillside. During Mr Walton's time, there was some little effort at improvement ; but Mr Burr did not attempt to carry out his plans, so the change was only temporary. There are more men at the quarter-sessions from Hillside than

from any other six villages in the district: two of the most determined poachers in the neighbourhood live there, and no later than last year, three men of the village were transported for a highway robbery on this very road. From all I know of them, they are a desperate and ill-conditioned race; and without a doubt, there is more sickness and distress amongst them in hard times, than in any other place I can name."

"I should like to purge my estate of the whole race!" ejaculated Maude, impatiently.

"Would it not be better to endeavour to remedy the evil? Of the irreclaimably bad, I say nothing; but all those untaught, or only ill-taught little beings, are not they worthy of an effort, Miss Talbot?"

"How can a people be well-cared for without a good priest to guide them? Mr Warburton, I have a thought in my head: it may be a foolish one, but you will not ridicule it, for it is the thought of thousands besides myself. What is the use of a learned gentleman—a mere classical scholar—amongst these uncultivated people?—of a gentleman, who spends

his time in his study, amongst the relics of past ages, feeding his own intellect, and leaving the souls of which he has the care to starve?—who gives them two full services on Sundays, and during the six days between, ignores their existence? Those people want a missionary priest—a soldier priest—one who will teach his people not from the pulpit only at stated times and seasons, but at stray occasions, in the fields and highways. There is much sending forth of the Gospel to far-off lands: I wish some enterprising person would set afoot a Home Missionary Society, to send out teachers into the bye-ways of England.”

Maude ceased speaking, for they were approaching Stanton Vicarage, over the garden gate of which, leaned the huge slovenly figure of Mr Burr. He raised his head as they approached, and displayed a broad, sallow, peculiarly disagreeable physiognomy. He bowed low to Miss Talbot, and familiarly to Mr Warburton.

“A most agreeable morning,” he said, bowing a second time to Maude; “this will

be the first occasion of your visiting Stanton, Madam, I presume? I do not remember to have seen you this way before. I am happy that Mr Warburton has not neglected his duties of guardian so much as some gentlemen do; but to be sure, he has temptation enough to continue them, and is well known as a gentleman of taste."

Philip could have struck the man to the ground for his insolent speech, and the leer that accompanied it; but as Maude simply bowed, and appeared not in the least discomposed, he contented himself with frowning at him, and anathematising his impertinence internally.

"He," continued Mr Burr, indicating Philip, "has introduced you to Hillside, Miss Talbot, I hope?"

"We rode through the village, which I am sorry to see in so neglected a state."

"Oh! a bad people, ma'am—a thoroughly bad people: bad in grain, as one may say. Never come inside the church: listen to no advice—bad, very bad."

"Then it is time we set about reforming

them; or, at least the younger generation."

"Eh? what! reforming Hillside? As well talk of reforming hell itself, ma'am: they are an irreclaimable set of men, women, and children."

"At least, Mr Burr, it is my intention to establish schools at Hillside and Stanton, and see what can be done in that way."

Mr Burr gave utterance to a low, but prolonged whistle of surprise and incredulity; which twisted his grim face into so absurd an expression, that Maude could scarcely forbear laughing. Mr Warburton, who during the time they had been standing, had manifested some degree of impatience, moved a few paces forward; and Maude, bowing to the astonished curate, left him to complete his whistle, and muse over her communication at leisure. They stood still to look at and admire the Church, which was a fine specimen of Norman architecture. Maude particularly admired the deep-arched door-way with rustic seats under its shelter. There was a thick growth of ivy half covering the tower, and a row of magni-



ficent elms sheltered the Church on the north. The windows were many of them composed of stained glass, and the grave-yard was kept with some care.

But the half-inhabited vicarage, with its tangled shrubberies and untended flower-garden, darkened windows, and unfurnished bare trellisses, had a miserable aspect; it typified well enough the neglected people over whom its tenant ruled. Maude rode on silently for some time after this examination, ruminating on the things which had been brought under her observation.

The village was at some little distance from the Church. Its aspect generally was an improvement on that of Hillside: there was the same effort after neatness about several of the cottages; but even here the children were rolling about in the dusty road, and in as dirty a state as might be expected from their occupation. At the further end of the village was a small thatched house, which Mr Warburton pointed out to Maude as a very superior place to those generally seen in that parish. Its garden was filled with spring

flowers, and several fruit-trees, sheeted with white blossoms, stood in the small orchard behind. A row of hives on a bench near the porch, the rustic seats under it, and the leafy creepers trained over the white-washed walls, made it a very pretty home-like place. There was an old man sitting at the door, his attention divided between a great book on his knee, and two little girls who were making daisy chains at his feet. The sound of the horses' feet made him lift his head, and the children dropped their flowers, and got up to look after the strangers. Mr Warburton pulled up.

"Well, Jefferson, how is the rheumatism to-day?" asked he.

"Much as usual at present, Sir: I have no cause to 'plain," replied the old man.

"How is your son? Those are his children, I suppose?"

"He is as God wills, Sir, neither better nor worse, but sore troubled in his mind: he is away again to the great toun out beyant there. I wish he wad bide at hame wi' his puir motherless bairns." And as the old man spoke, he looked sadly at the two children.

“ They are fine children. What are their names ? ” asked Maude.

“ Yes, madam, they are good bairns, too : Nellie and Jessie are their names ; and their father does talk of settling in the toun, and taking them wi’ him. But God forbid ! they are better at Stanton. I like nae the looks of these toun-bred lasses ; they are aye sickly and pining.”

“ You are right, Jefferson ; keep them here if you can,” said Mr Warburton.

“ My son Frank was aye a changeful, restless spirit ; he has had a vast of book larning, and he can’t bide content in Stanton. There are clubs, an’ societies, an’ lending libraries in the toun, such as please a man of his mind ; then the girls want schooling, which they can’t get here, he says : though wi’ his teaching, they are main clever bairns ; most of all Nell.”

“ They will not want schooling long : Miss Talbot is going to provide that for such as choose to profit by it,” said Mr Warburton.

“ God Almighty bless her for it ! but that is a good hearing. Ay, Nelly, what says’t to

biding at Stanton and being schooled here? that is fine, lass!" Nelly looked pleased, and fixed her clear grey eyes admiringly on the lady. Jessie, more shy and younger, peeped out from behind her grandfather and shook back her tresses of light hair from her delicate little face. What a pretty face it was!

"Nelly takes after her father, she is aye fond of a book. Nelly is a shrewd lassie;" and the old man drew her to his side with a caress. "Jessie is mair of a stay at home, like her mother; but they are rare bairns, and I should nae' like to lose 'em—but God's will be done, Sir: He can keep 'em frae evil in the toun as well as at Stanton; and if they maun gang, why, to His care I give 'em, puir lassies!"

Mr Warburton and Maude rode away.

"Father, it is a grand thing to be a lady like Miss Talbot," said Nelly when they were out of hearing.

"Bairn, bairn, think nae sae. Miss Talbot will hae her cares like ither folk. It is nae the rich that 'scapes at thegither the rod o' affliction;—maybe her sorrows are brewing up now, though it is nae for the like

of us to ken their bitterness. Look here, Nelly, —see what the wisest of all men and all kings says—‘The heart knoweth its own bitterness.’ Aye, bairn, ye yer ain sel’ may hae more lightsome hours than the proud bonnie-faced lady, whose sort your silly heart is like to envy. Gae on wi’ thy chains of daisies, Nellie,—think nae o’ fine ladies, foolish bairn.”

“Those were lovely children of Jefferson’s, Mr Warburton,” said Maude.

“Village beauties: and the old man doats on them evidently. That son of his is a man of an unsettled disposition: he is not without sense, and a certain amount of information, for his advantages have been greater than those of most of his class; but he is impregnated with these new and extravagant notions of the rights of the people, which are beginning to spread so widely. He is the man to sacrifice himself for his party,—to be made a tool of by cunning demagogues, and to be betrayed when of no further use, and made their scapegoat. I am afraid his settling in the town will be productive of evil results to himself and all connected with him. Unfor-

unately he is of an obstinate character, and not likely to yield to the representations or advice of any one in station above his own: he is peculiarly tenacious of his opinions, such as they are."

"How does he support his family?"

"Those children are entirely dependent on their grandfather, and have been so for some time. How the younger Jefferson maintains himself, I do not know: I offered him a situation as gamekeeper at the Manor, for he is a well-conducted man, and brave as a lion; but he told me it was inconsistent with his principles, and declined it. I could benefit him in no other way: regular employment was, I thought, the best thing to keep his mind from hankering after what is quite unattainable in the way society is at present constituted; but he was determined to go after his own vague theories. I can only hope they may not come to destruction together."

"Could he not be prevailed on to leave the children at Stanton with the old man?"

"Frank Jefferson is not a persuadable per-

son ; he is much more likely to prevail on his father to join him in the town, than to abandon his girls."

" I am interested for the poor, motherless children : there was a very intelligent look about Nelly, the elder girl. Did you not think so ? "

" She is a favourite of my mother's : there is something very winning about her. "

" True. "

At this point of the conversation the road diverged towards the Manor, and another, a bye-lane, led by a short cut to Eversleigh. Mr Warburton paused.

" My mother is longing for an introduction to you, Miss Talbot ; she is well enough now to receive company. May I take you to her to day ? " said he.

" Nothing would give me more pleasure. I feel already that I shall love Mrs Warburton, " replied Maude, with a soft glow deepening in her cheek. Philip Warburton's heart beat wildly ; his hopes rose in an instant many degrees.

" And my mother will love you, Maude ! "

he exclaimed, thrown off his guard for a moment. Maude started visibly at hearing herself so addressed, and she put her horse to its speed to conceal her emotion. After riding briskly for ten minutes or so, she slackened her pace. Philip was beside her.

“ You will appreciate my mother, which few people can. I am proud of her—I honour her,” he said warmly. “ She is one of a race of women which is fast dying out of the world.”

This was Mr Warburton's weak point—his veneration for his mother. Maude admired it; but there were many ladies, both married and single, who pronounced it utterly absurd, and made it the object of their ridicule. Mrs Warburton, from failing health, mingled little in society; her home and her son, of whom she was justly fond, were all-sufficient for her happiness. Old Mrs Sedley had been, during her lifetime, her most intimate friend: they had been companions in youth; and the bad circumstances of the one, and marriage of the other, had not broken off their communication entirely. Philip was the last and



youngest surviving child of a large family ; none the less precious to his widowed parent, for that he was the last of her beloved ones. She was respected by the tenantry of her son's estate, and liked by all who were admitted to the privilege of intimate acquaintance. There was, however, a prejudice in her mind against Maude Talbot, from the cavalier way in which she had put aside her guardian's advice during her minority. Though living within seven miles of each other, they had never met ; for Mrs Warburton had a residence in London, which she occupied part of the year, during the session of Parliament, that she might be with her son ; and Maude spent the autumn and Christmas at Clare Hall.

The two families had not been on terms of intimacy during the lifetime of the late Mr Warburton ; and the acquaintance between Mr James Talbot, Maude's father, and Philip, had its origin during their residence abroad. When Maude became known to her guardian, and would, through him, have most gladly formed an intimacy with his mother, Mrs

Warburton was attacked by a serious illness, from the effects of which she was even yet slowly recovering. During the last few months, however, Philip had essayed to wean her from the prepossession she had conceived against Maude: not with the success he had hoped, but still so far as to induce her to say that she would not resist Miss Talbot's advances, when that very self-willed and haughty young lady chose to come forward.

Philip thought himself justified in using a little manœuvring in this instance, and represented Mrs Warburton as impatient to see Maude. The only extenuation I can offer for his fault is what he said himself—"If my mother is not impatient to see her, she ought to be."

## CHAPTER VI.

### DOUBTS AND FEARS.

THE Manor was an entirely modern structure, extensive, handsome, and commodious, but quite destitute of that picturesque beauty which characterised Houghton Priory. The lawn was smooth shaven as velvet to the eye, and the trees stood in clumps and rows over the Park; but they looked young, and had been probably planted by Philip's father: they were not centuries old, like the oaks, and elms, and beeches of Houghton Chase. Maude's first sensation was one of disappointment; but as she rode through the village, neat and well-ordered, where no shabby thatched roofs or rotten palings met her glance, and each cottage had its cultivated plot of ground in front,

and its orchard behind, and passed the handsome Church and school-house of recent erection—she was compelled to acknowledge, tacitly at least, that these “new men” were not a whit behind the old lords of the soil in the maintenance of their tenants and property; and, in not a few instances, were marvelously beforehand with them.

The Manor village was more thriving in appearance than Houghton. They passed the first lodge, that Maude might have this opportunity of seeing the village in company with its Squire, and entered the Park by the gates beyond it, the town street being between them. The handsome new parsonage-house stood within a large garden, hidden from the road by a thick shrubbery; it was close by the Church, the lawn and grave-yard being divided only by a hedge of thorn.

“That is my mother’s doing,” observed Philip, pointing to the parsonage: “the clergyman’s residence formerly stood at a quarter of a mile from the Church, and was only a poor, decayed place. Our vicar, Dr Temple, has great pride in his grounds; his collection of roses may

almost rival yours at Houghton. When you know him, you will know my bean-ideal of an English country clergyman: a very different man from Mr Grandiose or Mr Burr, I assure you."

"He had need be," replied Maude. "Why, Mr Warburton, did you not afford me a page from your experience, in my minority, that Houghton might have equalled your village?" she said, glancing up at her companion from beneath the shadow of her broad, plumed hat.

Philip Warburton answered her question with a peculiar smile only.

"Ah, you think I might have rejected it—that I was self-willed and silly?—"

"Not so: not silly, but self-willed certainly," replied the ex-guardian, laughing.

Maude laughed, and shook back the ringlets that had strayed over her cheek, and put her horse into a canter on the soft turf of the park which they were crossing. Philip kept beside her until they drew up at the great entrance. A groom in plain but handsome livery, took the horses, and they entered the Hall.

“ We shall find my mother in her morning room, Miss Talbot,” said Philip, leading the way. “ Mother, I have brought you my late ward,” he said, as he opened the door of an elegant boudoir, which led by a glass door into a highly-cultivated flower garden. “ You have been long in making each other’s acquaintance :—a pleasure deferred is not, however, a pleasure lost.”

Maude thought there was much hauteur in the manner of Mrs Warburton as she rose to welcome her ; but the impression wore off as they conversed. Mrs Warburton had the appearance of being above sixty years of age ; the expression of her face, still handsome though faded, was prepossessing : her clear, dark eye, and silvery hair, smoothed away under a cap of rich lace from a forehead high and expansive ; her delicate nostril, and fair although colourless skin, and a look of sweet and dignified serenity, made up a countenance such as Maude had never before seen. Neither was Mrs Warburton less surprised at the sight of the beautiful young creature whom her son had brought to the Manor.

True, Philip had described and lauded her

over and over again to his prejudiced parent ; but glowing as his words were, they had not filled up the portrait of Maude Talbot. Almost without knowing why, the mother glanced with pity at her son, from that lovely face : she had no presentiment of happiness ensuing from his evident devotion to her ; and as she idolized Philip, Maude, gentle, fascinating, all beautiful as she was, made little way in Mrs Warburton's heart. Her son had not confessed to her his attachment for the Lady of Houghton, but his mother was not blind to its existence ; and after this interview with Maude, her wish that they had never met was strengthened a hundred-fold.

She said mentally : " No good can come of it : she is proud ; far prouder than Philip thinks. No : she may love him, for nobody could know Philip without loving him ; but she will not give her name of Talbot for that of Warburton."

So in this idea Mrs Warburton's hauteur vanished, and she conversed freely and kindly with the young girl, not with the wish of propitiating her, but that her son might not be

pained unnecessarily on her account, nor be tempted secretly to reproach his mother with being against him, when the day of his bitter disappointment should arrive.

More than once during the visit, Mrs Warburton might have doubted the accuracy of her judgment with regard to Maude, on this point; for there was a half-shy, half-deferential air in her way of listening to and answering Philip Warburton, which was particularly flattering and winning. It was evident to his mother that whatever her doubts might be, he did not share them; for his countenance wore an expression of great pride and gratification throughout the interview.

Philip Warburton had hoped that the morning might pass without any interruption from other visitors; and to his extreme annoyance, just as he was following Maude and his mother into the dining-room to luncheon, Mr Tempest was announced. Of course the old gentleman, though he vowed and declared he never ate anything between breakfast and dinner, sat down with a plate of chicken before him, "just to play



with," he said ; although Maude spitefully remarked that nothing but a pinion bone was left after he had played with it.

" I only meant just to look in on my friend Mrs Warburton in your absence. It is a long time since we have had the pleasure of seeing you about, madam ; but I hope you will shine on our society once more," said the old gentleman, with a sufficiently laughable attempt at a gallant bow.

Mrs Warburton thanked him, but said that for some months she was engaged to her own fireside ; and then she asked him if he was going into Scotland to visit his brother's family during the summer.

" Why, madam, I scarcely know. Scotland does not quite suit my constitution."

" A beautiful country !" interjected Philip Warburton.

" Well, Sir, well ; some people say it is, and some people say it is not : though you are the last man in the world I should choose to contradict, you must permit me to say that I think Scotland the most odious country in Europe ;" and the fat Squire waved his hand, in

the vehemence of his feelings, in a rather alarming manner.

Philip had a malicious school-boy trick of exciting Mr Tempest's foible, so he added, "The fogs certainly are a drawback—"

"Oh, it is not the fogs; I am not sure that they are not the best part about it: I like to see the mists clearing off the hills, and hanging in white clouds above them; but I cannot be sure what it is I hate so—only it is a detestable place,—a most detestable place."

"The people generally—" interposed Philip, meekly.

"Oh! excuse me, it is not the people: they are a good people in the main—a very good people," interrupted Mr Tempest, eagerly.

"I quite agree with you," replied Philip.

"I do not want any man to agree with me against his convictions," said the testy old man; who, finding no one disposed to contradict him, performed the office for himself. "They are poor, and proud, and mean, and tuft hunters every one—"

"There I must venture to differ from you," said Philip.

“Pray, my dear sir, excuse me : not for the world would I offend you, but I must support my own opinion. All the people of that nation who have fallen under my notice have been poor and proud, and most of them mean.”

At this moment one of the gardeners passed the window with a fine flowering plant in his arms, which he was carrying from the conservatory to the drawing-room. The window was open, and Mr Tempest caught sight of him.

“Hey ! what, what !” sputtered the old gentleman, growing so red in the face that Maude was apprehensive for his safety : “Jenkyns here ! You don’t employ him surely, Mr Warburton ? A fellow like that !—”

“He is a respectable man enough, and a very good gardener. Frankish says he is the best about the place,” replied Philip.

“A reprobate, sir, a shocking reprobate ! married, sir, when he was nineteen, a mere baby of a girl,—brought him eight children in no time, the atrocious woman. Can you, sir, social economist as you are, tell me what is the good of labouring folk marrying at nineteen, and having families, sir ? They

ought to be discouraged, sir—put down : no country can flourish where the poor folks have eight children at a time—that is not quite what I mean; but you understand me, sir : eight children a-piece, I should have said. If I were a young man, sir, I would go into Parliament, and I would propose a new way of amending the condition of the poor. Not a man-jack of 'em should marry till forty—not one!”

“ You would not find many to agree with you,” said Philip Warburton, smiling.

“ Every man of sense in the house, sir.”

“ But, Mr Tempest, it is just possible that the people for whom you were agitating, would be so ungrateful as to neglect your advice, and go on marrying as before,” said Maude Talbot, smiling.

“ Advice, ma'am ! I would not leave it as advice. It should be a law, ma'am ; for the breach of which a man should be as severely punished as for stealing his neighbour's goods. Six months at the tread-mill for every child, and a year for twins : what say you to that, Miss Talbot ? Would not that be effectual ? ”

Philip laughed outright, and said he feared even that might be ineffectual.

“But as it is unlikely such a thing should ever be tried in a country like England, we will not differ about it,” remarked Philip: for his mirth had excited a visible ferment in Mr Tempest’s mind, who sat fidgetting about in his chair with a very apoplectic countenance. Just as he was preparing to explode into a violent fit of coughing, Jenkyns repassed the window, laden with plants which had ceased to flower. Mr Tempest caught sight of him, and sprang from his chair.

“Eh! what, you fellow! stop a minute!” shouted the irascible old gentleman, poking his head out of the window.

The gardener, startled at this sudden summons from an individual of whom he stood in particular dread, dropped his burden, and faced about with a comical look of fright and vexation. Mr Tempest immediately began to load him with abuse, to which Jenkyns paid no attention; and having collected the fragments of the plants broken in their fall, he moved rapidly off to the green-house.

“Plague take the fellow, he never would stand still to be damned!” muttered the Squire, returning to his seat.

Maude Talbot had so keen a perception of the ludicrous, that she could scarcely forbear laughing at this little scene ; but by exerting a considerable degree of self-command, and concentrating her attention on her plate, she escaped attracting Mr Tempest’s notice to her amusement ; for, like all passionate persons, he was very suspicious of exciting ridicule, and very implacable when he was offended. As he had the reputation, besides, of being a bitter enemy and an unsteady friend, nobody cared to awaken his animosity. Mrs Warburton was annoyed at the destruction of some of her favourite plants, one of them exceedingly rare ; and Philip did not venture to speak, lest the already heated Squire should contrive to fasten a quarrel upon him.

Under these circumstances, it was a great relief when he took his departure, promising to renew his visit at no very distant date.

The party assembled at the luncheon-table, saw him come into collision with Jen-

kyns as he took a short cut across the gardens; but the man seemed equally disinclined as before to "stand still to be damned;" so, after following him a few paces, and apostrophising him in a very energetic way, Mr Tempest wheeled round, and trotted homewards.

"Mother, what a pity it is Mr Tempest should have selected you as his particular favourite," remarked Philip Warburton, glancing merrily at his parent.

"Why so, Philip?" asked Mrs Warburton.

"Because he always contrives to intrude himself upon us when we would much rather he stayed away; and he evidently labours under the delusion that his society is a valuable addition to ours: a mistake from which I should particularly like to arouse him. Do you not remember, mother, how, when cousin Annie was staying here last summer, he constantly broke in upon our pleasant retirement? Annie was amused; but I, for my part, heartily wished him away. Do not think me inhospitable, Miss Talbot; but Mr Tempest is a man I cannot like."

Maude had looked up hastily at this familiar mention of "Cousin Annie;" but seeing the penetrating eye of Mrs Warburton fixed on her face, she laughed, and said that Mr Tempest was not a favourite of her's either.

"I possess an inimitable caricature of him done by Cousin Annie when he was in one of his excited moods: I must shew it to you some day; and after you come back from London, I shall hope to make you acquainted with Annie Carey: I assure you she is a lady *comme il y en a peu*. Is she not, mother?"

"Yes, Philip," replied Mrs Warburton, with a sigh; thinking how happy it would make her to see that Annie Carey filling the place in her son's affections which Maude Talbot had usurped.

Philip noticed the sigh, and not being altogether unsuspicious of its cause, he turned the subject.

"Miss Talbot," said he, "I have no gallery of family portraits, grim and dusty, to shew you; but I flatter myself, that the collection of pictures made by my father, and added to by myself, is worth looking at. May I have



the pleasure of shewing them to you? Mother, will you accompany us?"

"Thanks, Philip; Miss Talbot will excuse me. I never can encounter your tirade on fine arts; it is too much for me. Pray do not tire your young friend."

Maude smiled internally, thinking how impossible a thing it would be to weary with Philip Warburton beside her; and she followed him across the great Hall to the gallery, not altogether sorry to leave the grave, handsome mother of her late guardian.

Philip Warburton had not exaggerated when he said his pictures were worth looking at. There were several by modern artists, whose names were but little known at the time, and all were pieces of beauty and merit.

"Ah! this, this I like!" suddenly exclaimed Maude, pausing before a life-sized portrait.

"My cousin Annie,—sweet Annie Carey!" quickly replied Philip, passing on to close a window at the further end of the gallery.

The portrait was that of a girl of fourteen: a fair, merry face, with eyes of the deepest

blue looking out from a wilderness of auburn ringlets. There was a great dog beside her, the image of Lupa, and the two looked as if they were just resting from such a romp as Lettice and he sometimes engaged in. The heightened tint on the round cheek; the slightly parted lips, dilated nostril, and small white chin; the bare throat and shoulders gleaming snowy white through the tangled hair, made Maude gaze long and admiringly,—so long, indeed, that Philip came and stood beside her to see what the attraction was.

“That picture fascinates you, as it does every one!” he remarked.

Maude started: she did not know he was so near her, and then moved on; though not another picture could she see or care for, because that girlish face of “Cousin Annie’s” filled up her mental eye completely, and obtruded itself into every scene. She would have given much to know all about this “sweet Annie Carey;” but she did not venture to ask, lest Philip should suspect her of a motive: for she had already begun to feel jealous even of his thoughts of others; although she would

have been ashamed to confess so much to herself, and would have been highly indignant if anybody had accused her of feeling more than a friendly interest in her ex-guardian.

Philip was far from imagining the thoughts to which the sight of the portrait had given rise, and he continued to offer explanations and criticisms on the other pictures before which Maude stopped mechanically; though, for any profit she derived from them, Philip might as well have been on the top of St Paul's, lecturing to the winds of heaven. He was not long in noticing her inattention; and attributing it to weariness of the subject, he proposed returning to his mother's boudoir.

"No, Mr Warburton, I must pay my adieux to Mrs Warburton, and then depart," she said, hastily. "Lettice will have thought this a wearisomely long day. Will you be so good as to ring for the horses, whilst I go to Mrs Warburton?"

Philip was surprised, but he gave the order she wished, and then accompanied her to the boudoir. The very quick glance of Mrs Warburton immediately detected that something

had occurred to ruffle her visitor; but her son's face of grave pre-occupation afforded her no clue; so she shook hands with Maude, begged her to renew her visit soon, promised her own earliest call should be at Houghton, and felt immensely relieved when her extremely beautiful and haughty guest had taken her departure.

“ I cannot help it : I know she will bring him nothing but sorrow ! ” mentally ejaculated the old lady, as the door closed, in extenuation of the dislike she felt for Maude ; and then she composed herself for a nap in a luxurious easy-chair by the fire, whilst her son and Miss Talbot rode away across the park towards Houghton.

## CHAPTER VII.

### AN EVENING AT HOUGHTON.

“HERE come my little friend Lettice and Miss Sedley,” said Mr Warburton, as they entered Houghton Chace.

Lupa caught sight of them too, and went bounding over the grass with vociferous mirth to meet them. These were almost the only words that had been spoken since the two left the Manor House. Maude was *distracte* and tired; Philip puzzled to discover the cause of his companion’s taciturnity, and not over-well pleased to find how much influence on his feelings the whimsical caprices of a young girl had. He was more than once inclined to call himself a fool for his weakness, but when he looked into Maude’s exquisite face, and scanned

her perfectly-moulded figure, he readily acknowledged that they, independently of her mental charms, were sufficient to justify any degree of infatuation and folly.

He was not altogether wrong who remarked, that love enters at man's eye. Philip was assuredly bewitched by Maude's loveliness, or he would have resented the little notice she bestowed on him as they rode to Houghton; nor would he have taken his way back to the Manor with such delicious thoughts rioting in his heart. When a man of thirty becomes the victim of a "*grande passion*," he is certainly more out of his wits than a youth of eighteen in the same predicament; though he may make less clamour on the subject of his success or disappointment. That Maude liked his society he was well assured, and he thought himself not far from her love; so that her fits of hauteur and silence, though they had an uncomfortable effect at the time, left no lasting impression of annoyance. He forgave her caprices, as part of woman's nature, and, to some extent, of her attraction also.

As they paced their horses side by side on the smooth turf, Philip glanced aside at Maude frequently : grave as she was, she was looking exquisitely beautiful ; the exercise and air had deepened the soft tint of her cheek, and her hair, in long loose ringlets, gleamed like gold in the sunshine. Maude was not unconscious of these stolen glances, but she was thinking that Warburton might have told her something of his cousin Annie : she felt rather injured and pettish. Remember, she was very young : it is only those very young girls who trifle so with their peace, making troubles from shadows.

“ Oh, Maude ! how long you have been away. Mr Warburton, you should not take my sister so far ; see, she is quite tired ! ” exclaimed Lettice as she met them.

“ I am not so very tired, Lettice : where have you been to-day ? Dragging Miss Sedley through the woods in quest of wild-flowers, I should think ? ”

“ I have taken her a very pretty walk—to the ruins, and the Nun's Well—so now she is tired, and she turned back to the house when

I came to meet you and Lupa: I shall not mention you, Mr Warburton, for I am not pleased with you for tiring Maude." Philip smiled.

"You promised some day to go to the Nun's Well too," continued the child, shaking her head at Philip, "but you forgot, I suppose; and we are all going to London directly, where there are no nice ruins and woods to see. Mr Evelyn is quite as bad: I do believe he would rather read the yellowest old book in the library than go out into the fields."

"Well, Lettice, if we all live till autumn, then we will go: all of us—quite a party," said Philip.

"Autumn, autumn! I don't like autumn!" replied Lettice, softly. "I like the fresh green leaves and spring flowers. I don't like to go trampling and treading amongst the fallen, brown leaves on the paths: spring is the best time, and early summer."

"Then next year be it!"

"Next year! So long as that! Who knows where we shall be then, eh?—Lupa, shall we all be at Houghton then?"



“Lupa would answer Yes, if he could speak.”

“Then he would be a foolish dog to count on so distant a pleasure.”

“Since when, my little Lettice, have you turned philosopher?” asked Maude, laughing.

Lettice looked up in her face, and laughed too.

“Ever since my first disappointment.”

“Your disappointments have been few, Lettice,” replied Maude.

“Could you not count them, every one?” asked Philip.

“Oh! you two venerable people, have you to ask wisdom from little Lettice? Don’t you know, both of you, the hundreds of unspoken disappointments which come to everybody? Are you sure you have no little stings and private griefs, which you never tell? I have innumerable ones!” And the child smiled sadly.

“Poor young martyr!” ejaculated Philip.

“Mr Warburton, I do not like you when you laugh in that way. Even Lupa himself

has his sorrows, and futile expectations ; have you not, Lupa ?” Lupa wagged his tail.

A groom stood waiting to take Miss Talbot’s horse as they rode up to the entrance ; he assisted her from the saddle, and she stood on the lowest step.

“ Can I prevail on you to come in, Mr Warburton ?” she asked, raising her eyes to his face.

“ I must return to the Manor to dine, or I should gladly accept your proposal. My mother is not used to miss me for an entire day when we are in the country. I shall see you before your departure for town.”

“ Oh yes, pray, ride over !” said Maude, recovering her sweetness of temper ; “ we are always and all of us charmed to see you.”

Philip Warburton retook his solitary way home, with those words, and the smile that accompanied them, making sweet melody amongst his heart-strings.

And Maude, what did she do ? She paused on the steps for a few seconds after Philip had turned away, with Lettice beside her waving farewell to Lupa and his master ; then she drew the child after her, and went in—looked

into the drawing-room to say a few words to Miss Sedley; but finding it empty, she took her way upstairs to her own room, followed by Lettice.

“Ring for Aimée, my Letty,” said she, sitting down on a couch by the open window, and throwing her plumed hat on a stool beside her. Maude was rather indolent and luxurious in her tastes at this time of her life. Everything in these, her private apartments, testified it. The low chairs and couches covered with pale blue silken damask; the bed with its embroidered muslin hangings; the thick carpet, deadening the sound of every footstep; the few choice pictures and statuettes; the costly vases filled with flowers;—everything harmonized. The French maid, a smart, bright-eyed, little body, came tripping gently into the room, and began at once to disencumber her mistress of her riding attire in silence. Aimée, unlike many of her class, had the tact to perceive when her chatter would be agreeable or otherwise; and her discernment told her now that anything which disturbed the course of her lady’s thoughts would be unwelcome.

Lettice had subsided into a chair, with a great book of engravings on her knee, kept there especially for her entertainment ; for she was apt to tease Aimée when dressing her sister, with scraps of advice which the Abigail did not always approve, as she esteemed her own taste perfection : so Maude thought on uninterrupted.

I suppose all beautiful women are conscious of the fact. Maude was ; she appreciated it too : she was glad she was beautiful. She did not think of years, and wrinkles, and grey hairs ; but in the present time she had full and perfect satisfaction. It was not a question with her of how long it should last : how soon these pleasant things should pass away. Probably no one ever lived more joyously and more fearlessly in the midst of happiness than she did. It seemed an impossible thing that any decay, any blight, should touch her radiant loveliness ; that any bitterness of soul should rise up within her. Little annoyances she could pass by carelessly, and great troubles she never dreamt of. She felt secure, fenced in, hedged about. Alas, Maude ! no

shield, no tower of defence can ward off the barbed arrow: be sure it will find you out at last, be your stronghold ever so firm and sure. Not yet; not yet, however!

Sitting before the tall mirror, her eyes unconsciously fixed on the reflection of her own perfect form and face, a faint smile playing round the half-open lips, she looked as if she might defy sorrow to come nigh her. Aimée twisted her long hair into a thick wreath at the back of her head, asked her if she approved the style, and fell back a few paces to contemplate her handiwork, affirming that it was admirable, so;—that it was perfection. Maude told her impatiently to proceed, and the Abigail gathered up the loose front tresses to entwine over the other; but her young mistress shook them down, remembering the lovely face of “Cousin Annie” of the picture gallery, with its veil of gold gleaming hair, and thinking perhaps that her own might equally defy criticism. Aimée ventured on a brief remonstrance. She wished to see her mistress “*coiffée en Grécque*.”

“Not now, my good Aimée. Some day, per-

haps, when I am growing strict and solemn, I will adopt your method : it would not suit me now," said Maude, laughing.

" Don't talk of it, Maude ; surely that time will never come to you !" exclaimed Lettice, putting down her book, and creeping to her sister's side.

" And why not, bonnie birdie ?" And as Maude spoke she cast her eyes up to the sky with a proud, bright glance—in her own heart thinking how safe she was yet from the fore-shadow of evil—and then down on Letty's upturned face, gazing at her with a wistful love.

" Do not let us fancy troubles that may never come, sister mine," added the elder. " Let us think that we are set on a pleasant path : it is the best philosophy."

" The God who sends the April shower, in the wild tempest's wrath, is with us still !" murmured Lettice, laying her delicate cheek on her sister's hand. Maude made no answer. There was not in her spirit the same pious, confiding love that was part of Letty's being. She looked up again at the blue sky, with a more questioning, graver look ; bade Aimée hasten ;

and, when her toilette was complete, holding Letty's hand, she descended to the drawing-room, silent and meditative.

Miriam Sedley was there, standing by the window, looking out into the twilight. She allowed the sisters to approach her quite closely before she turned round, and when she did so, she looked pale and weary, though her mouth held its usual resolute firmness. Maude hoped she was well? Quite well, but tired. The dinner-bell sounded. They passed into the brilliantly-lighted room—for Maude liked state, even when without company—and sat down; Lettice, with her china bowl of new milk and bread (for she dined earlier) at the lower end of the table, with Floss beside her, meekly begging with lifted paws for his customary portion.

Miriam's paleness shewed more obviously in the glare of light, and Maude renewed her inquiries after her health, but Miriam assured her that all was well. The truth was, Miriam had a growing, unconquered bitterness and disappointment at her heart, which she must not express. It robbed her pillow of sleep, her

waking hours of peace; but she was struggling against it:—she was “grieving down.” The process was slow and painful, but one that must be passed; and in all its anguish there was this one consolation, that besides herself no living thing knew its cause: no small consolation to a temper like Miriam’s, under the circumstances. The knowledge of Philip’s devotion to Maude did not irritate her; it was natural they should love each other: but Miriam was still woman, and sometimes she did feel how much she would sacrifice for Maude’s dower of beauty.

“Beauty is but skin deep,” says the old saw; yet few women have not in their lifetime felt either how precious an endowment it is, or how great a power. Like all good gifts of God, it may be used for evil; but it is not the less a good. Miriam knew she had not beauty: if she had been beautiful, Philip might have noticed her more, known her better, loved her, and she would have been happy; but she was small, dark, had no salient points of character to be remarked, and she was overlooked; therefore Miriam regretted the want of that



unattainable good—beauty. She was not enviously-minded: no, she would not have deprived Maude of one feature of loveliness; but, oh! how happy she might have been if she had had her charms. How desolate she now felt in the days of her faded, loveless youth. Let us leave her. Her's is not the heart to break; to beat itself to pieces against the bars of its cage. She has had her dream, and she has her waking: her tears, her weariness, her passionate regret; but they will go by: not be forgotten, perhaps; yet not lingered over to the utter exclusion of other thoughts. They may come back now and then with a sudden pang, as our past sorrows will; but they will not darken her mind to all other good in life.

There is a future for her as well as for the happy—a time when she shall have rest and comfort as well as they—a time when they shall all be equal: in that future is her strong hope, to hold on by to the last. Let us leave her so; remembering that she is human, and having some little pity for the thousand twilight, flowerless lives going by us on every side—the lives of secret denial and uncomplaining

trouble, which come across us day by day ; remembering that for every great and startling grief, falling like the thunderbolt, there are a hundred hidden blights—shut up, hidden away—the coiled serpent in every heart ; and remembering these, being merciful and pitiful to those about us, lest by harsh word or deed we crush still deeper down the passive, bleeding spirit.

Miriam, in her chamber, thinks of these things : thinks how many careless stabs are dealt out in the world daily ; how many wounded hearts shrink feverishly from the rude probe of sarcasm and contumely :—thinks of these things, and is thankful for her better lot.

Her better lot ! No hard toil now ; no constant drag on her energies : a lot of comparative ease and tranquillity, and one to be thankful for. Edith Fairfax in her convent exile, Mabel Staunton in her days of feverish triumph, are filled with dreams of far other things. Miriam Sedley, yours is not by many the only unsatisfied heart on which the sun goes down ! Be at peace !

Lettice sympathized with her serious gover-

ness. Some children are quick at detecting grief, and far, oh ! far more delicate and tender in their consolations than the more experienced. They do not reason about their own or others troubles. You never find Job's comforters among them. No matter whether your sorrow be of your own planting, the fruit of the seed you yourself have sown,—they will pity without blaming and without questioning.

So Lettice, without knowing why, felt for Miss Sedley. She did not comment on her pale cheek or heavy eyes ; but she would sit quietly by her, reading, if she were very sad ; and when the gloomy hour passed, would win her out amongst the flowers, and chatter in that foolish, childish strain which was her pretty way of gaining attention. Miriam began to love her, and to look into the child's eyes with confidence ; and so it came to pass, that the bright, petted child, and the grave, disappointed woman, became very close and dear friends.

Many a quiet glance did Lettice send across to where Miss Sedley sate at dinner by her beautiful sister. Maude seemed, in her gay health and loveliness, to need nothing ; so the

child looked most to the drooping, grey figure of her governess : she longed to creep to her side and tell her how much she loved her—to beg her to look up and smile, and be comforted. With the glaring wax-lights, the tall footman and grey-headed butler standing in silent dignity behind his lady's chair, this was impossible ; so she waited patiently, teasing Flossy meanwhile, until dinner was over and they returned to the drawing-room. Then she ensconced herself in a corner near Miss Sedley, while Maude sat down on a couch with a book in her hand : more for pretence than occupation, for she did not read three pages. In a preoccupied mind like Maude's, there is no room for other people's ideas : there is a perpetual influx of bright dreams, which needs no other company to fill the heart. Miriam smiled down on her little comforter, and looked a shade less sad ; Lettice smiled too, and preferred a request.

“ Will you sing me one song before Aimée fetches me to go to bed—only one ? ”

Miriam said she would.

Lettice sang very sweetly, and she was pas-

sionately fond of music. Maude sang, as she did most other things, exquisitely ; every tone seemed to echo out from her soul—proud, passionate, and gay ; but Lettice liked Miriam's songs the best.

“What shall I sing ?” asked Miriam, sitting down to the piano, with the child by her.

“Oh! sing me ‘The Land o’ the Leal!’” replied Lettice ; and Miriam sang it.

“It is my favourite song,” said the child : “I shall always love that song.” And as she went upstairs with Aimée to bed, they heard her pleasant, childish tones swelling into the song.

Maude had listened too, with her dreamy appreciation of everything beautiful, and afterwards she eyed the unpretending face of Miriam, who sat opposite her, with more interest than it had ever excited in her before. Maude said in her heart : “That cold, unmonstrative woman has loved!” And Maude was right.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE CLARE FAMILY.

LADY CLARE'S boudoir was a scene of earnest consultation on the morning that Miss Talbot was expected to arrive in London. There was Lady Clare herself, Sir James (on sufferance) and their three tall daughters—the Dragons, as Maude irreverently called them.

The baronet stood fidgetting about, first on one foot and then on the other, evidently very impatient of the discussion, and panting to be off to his club. His lady, in the stiffest of brocades and the most brilliant of caps, sat erect, stately, and earnest, in a most rigid-looking chair ; the dragons, Sara, Juliet, and Ada, in various proper lady-like attitudes, were grouped about the papa and mama.

“ Well, well, get who you like, and what you like, but don't bother me every morning in this way : I really can't stand it. This place is enough to stifle one,” gasped the old gentleman, spasmodically.

“ The day is very warm,” blandly replied Lady Clare, mollified at this unhesitating concession to a rather unreasonable demand : namely, that she might fill her house weekly with a crowd of people for whom they cared nothing, and who cared nothing for them, and so involve her worthy partner in divers expenses which his respectable income was by no means calculated to meet. His remonstrances she had met with the unanswerable argument, “ that it must be done : that everybody who was anybody did it ;” and she ended by bidding him look at his daughters, and asking who he expected to marry them if they never went anywhere, and never saw people ?

As is usual in such cases, the papa gave way, and the enterprising mama began to spread her nets for conquest, like the very clever woman she was. It was high time she did so, if she ever meant to see her daughters married ; for

though they had been "out" several seasons, they had none of them had an eligible offer. Highly educated, strictly proper girls they were. Not beauties any of them; rather the contrary. Straight, lathy, angular figures; with pale complexions, light hair, eyebrows, and eyes, and undecided features: but they dressed well, and talked well; only rather too precisely. They were all ambitious of settling in life, but left any overt acts in the art of conquest to be performed by their respected mama.

If any of them had a decided characteristic, it was a dislike of Maude Talbot. Her beauty had something to do with it, probably. However it was, in their hearts they hated her; though for worlds they would not have proclaimed it, even to each other.

When Sir James left the boudoir, which he did immediately he had acceded to his wife's request, the four ladies relaxed, and chatted as women never can do in the presence of men, be they never so intimately related to them.

"Now, mama, about my bonnet for Lady Dulwich's breakfast?" exclaimed Ada.



“Let it be as you like, my love!—white crape and violets,” replied Lady Clare mildly.

“Then, may we have the carriage for Madame Luçon’s this morning? I suppose to-morrow we must call on that very dameish woman, Mrs Warburton, with Miss Talbot?”

“My dear I wish you would speak more respectfully of that person. Her son, Mr Philip Warburton, is a very pleasant man, and has a fine property near Houghton.”

“He is good looking, too!” exclaimed Juliet, who was a shade more lively than her sisters.

“Juliet, it is indelicate to discuss the looks of gentlemen. I have told you so before!” said Lady Clare, shaking her head gravely at the offender, who looked abashed, and retired behind her book meekly.

“Mrs Dobbs said last night, mama, that Mr Warburton was constantly at Houghton; that Miss Talbot rode about the country with him, and consulted him on all her plans of improvement. She even hinted that it was more than suspected that he had a penchant for his ward, or she for him,” said Sara.

“ Mrs Dobbs is a gossiping person—a person I shall never like. There is something very low about her,” replied Lady Clare, with dignity. “ Miss Talbot may aspire to the highest rank beneath royalty ; and I need not remind you that Mr Warburton’s origin is trade : not that I would be understood to depreciate him in any way. Sir James respects him highly : I have even heard him say that there is not a man in England whom he should prefer before Mr Warburton as a son-in-law. It is possible that he may be a great deal here, and I should wish you to distinguish him. As for Miss Talbot thinking of him, the idea is most ridiculous. Pray, do not name it to her !”

“ Miss Talbot is not at all the style of girl I should select as my intimate friend,” observed Sara, after a pause ; “ there is a degree of unfeminine decision and pride about her, which I never could approve of : I fear her mind is but ill-regulated.”

“ Remember how few her advantages have been in comparison with yours : I can make some allowance for her defects of temper.”

“Then people rave so about her beauty: I am sure Cecily Dobbs is quite as pretty, if not prettier (Cecily Dobbs was of the wax-doll order.) But beauty is entirely a matter of taste.”

“So it is, Sara,” remarked Juliet, who had recovered the snubbing she had received from her mama in the matter of Mr Warburton; “so it is: I should not be at all surprised to hear that somebody had said our straw-coloured hair and washed-out complexions were infinitely preferable to Maude Talbot’s Bianca Capello brilliance: should you?”

“I should, Juliet. We have no pretensions to beauty; but I hope, that we have principles and endowments that will recompense us amply for the absence of so frail a good.”

“I wish I were beautiful, though!” ejaculated Juliet, drolly. She was the plainest of the three.

“Juliet, I am ashamed that a daughter of mine should express such sentiments!” said Lady Clare, grimly. Sara and Ada looked shocked.

“Well, mama, I do love beauty; I cannot help it,” persisted Juliet, pouting.

“My dear, you have acquired some strange ideas lately. What are you reading there?”

“Only that odious book on botany you told me to study before we go to the next flower-show, in case Lord Linnet is there, that I may seem to understand all about the plants, and discourse scientifically on the matter. What a pity his tiny lordship was not born poor: he would make an excellent gardener!”

“I daresay Lord Linnet is more content with his station than you with your face, Juliet.”

“Perhaps he is: Linnet Lodge is a pretty place!”

“Have you practised with Ada that duet he admired so much?”

“Yes, mama, and very ugly it is—and atrociously difficult—”

“Juliet, do not speak in that style: it is bad taste—very bad taste indeed.”

“Do you think he will be at Lady Dulwich’s breakfast on Tuesday?”

“It is more than probable that he will, Juliet.”

“He will be struck with Maude Talbot: he

likes tall women—he told me so last week.”

Lady Clare was conscious of a pleased flutter of surprise under the ample folds of her brocade.

Juliet and the botanically-inclined peer were evidently on intimate terms—far more intimate than she had supposed; and her vagrant imagination instantly carried her off to the troubled region of settlements for younger children, dower, house, &c., and the momentous and engrossing visions of satins and laces white and bridal. Juliet was quite as tall as Maude Talbot, if not taller. Lady Clare began to wonder when Lord Linnet would request an interview with Sir James. She determined to cultivate the shy young lordling more than ever. Juliet might have talked a great amount of nonsense after that lucky speech without risking another snub. That admission of Lord Linnet's, that he liked tall women, was tantamount to a declaration, in Lady Clare's mind: she felt very placid, and at peace with all mankind. Ada was quick-witted; she improved the “shining hour.”

"My pink satin slip, mama, does not look nearly so fresh as it did," she said.

"It is hardly to be expected that it should, my love, after having done duty five seasons. We must consult Madam Luçon about new dresses for you at Lady Casterton's party: it will not do to be shabby now," said the perspective mother-in-law of Lord Linnet.

"I should so like a blue crêpe with silver braid, like Cecily Dobbs," insinuated Ada.

Juliet asked for nothing. She saw how the wind set, and knew that no petition was needed to clothe her in the freshest of satins and most brilliant of blondes.

"Well, girls, let us have the carriage round to go to Madame Luçon's; Miss Talbot will not be here until dinner, probably," said Lady Clare, with a satisfied sigh.

More than one of the party wished she was not coming at all, though they refrained from saying so. They had internal misgivings as to the eclipse they should undergo, with that very lovely young heiress beside them, in their park drives and rides, and their ball-room costumes. Poor girls! they were grow-

ing old without having discovered their vocation. Pardon them a little spite!

As the female quartette drove off to Madame Luçon's, they reverted to the inexhaustible topic of Maude Talbot; and long before they were set down at the fashionable milliner's door, they had flattered themselves and each other into the belief, that they were infinitely superior in everything to that much bepraised and envied young lady. In this happy frame of mind, they returned home just in time to see a travelling carriage with four horses drive from the door, after having deposited its load, Miss Talbot, Aimée, and Saunders.

At the last, Maude had been prevailed on to leave Lettice and Miss Sedley at Houghton; and the more readily, as Lady Clare was not particularly pressing for their coming. But Maude consoled herself with the reflection that her absence would be of no very long duration, and that for future seasons, Talbot House, which during her minority had been let, could be prepared for her reception and theirs; as it would be no difficult matter to obtain an eligible

chaperon to reside with her. This plan she had thought of putting into execution, instead of going to Sir James Clare's ; but Mr Warburton had dissuaded her from following out her scheme, and for her first season, at least, had induced her to place herself under the care of Lady Clare ; who, he rightly assured her, was a person of popular manners, having the entrée in the best circles, and not so very disagreeable an individual after all.

It was not with the best grace in the world that Maude saw her liberties so curtailed ; but perceiving that Philip Warburton was in earnest in discountenancing her project of occupying Talbot House, she yielded : trying, however, to persuade herself, that it was from no real respect for his opinion, but merely to save herself trouble. That she might not be entirely dependant on the Clares, however, she had determined to take her own carriages, horses, and servants, and these were easily accommodated in the neighbourhood ; so that, as far as lay in her power, she had fenced herself in from the possibility of restraint and restriction whilst living with the Clares.



Before Lady Clare appeared, Maude had taken possession of the suite of rooms allotted to her use, having been inducted into them by the stately housekeeper, who stood with hands folded over her apron, making profuse apologies for the absence of her mistress; when that lady, backed by her trio of Graces, tripped softly across the carpet, and clasped the astonished Maude in her arms, kissing her on either cheek, before her guest had noticed her entrance. The ceremony was repeated by the three young ladies with equal fervour, and then Maude was permitted to sit down with a Grace on each side of her, and another leaning over the back of her chair, while their lady mother reposed on a couch opposite her. Maude felt she ought to be grateful for so tender a reception; but somehow she could not help thinking it rather a bore, for she was not deceived as to the real amount of affection they bore her.

“We have been wearying for you all day; now you are come, I feel perfectly happy,” said Ada, languidly, untying the strings of her bonnet.

Maude wished internally she had it in her power to shorten the period of the young lady's beatitude by absenting herself from their society forthwith.

"My girls have longed for your coming intensely, Miss Talbot: they will begin to enjoy the gaieties of the season now. I am congratulating myself on the pleasure I shall have in presenting you—equal to that I felt in presenting my own children."

"Maude Talbot, I quite envy you the bloom you have brought from Houghton: you will look like a gorgeous tropical plant amongst pale weeds!" said Juliet.

"Oh! there will be hundreds to outbloom me, both in complexion and attire," laughed Maude, glancing from her own grey-tinted silk to the flounced, changing-hued garbs of the Clare girls. The glance was not lost on Sara, though she misinterpreted it.

"London is full at present—everybody is here:—everybody one knows, I mean," said she, shaking out the folds of her brilliant dress to catch the sunlight from one of the windows.

"The Castertons and Dulwich's, and your

neighbours, the Dobbs and Warburtons, and hundreds of others to whom we must introduce you. Don't you long for your first ball? for the opera, and the park? Oh! it is delightful!"

Maude expressed a suitable degree of enthusiasm and eagerness to participate in these unknown pleasures, and secretly wished it would please the Graces to vacate her apartments, for she was tired after her journey, and heated by sitting in her travelling costume. At last it pleased them to retire, when Maude flung off her bonnet with a gesture of irrepressible weariness and disgust.

Aimée returned to her mistress with a smirk of great satisfaction on her face, for she had discovered in the lower regions a French cook, engaged only for the season, who happened to be an old acquaintance, and they had had a little chat already. She was so full of her own happiness at being in London once more, and meeting Adolphe, that it was some time before she noticed Maude's annoyed look. When she did so at last, she exclaimed, with even more than her usual vivacity,—

“Est-il possible ! Mam’selle n’est pas triste assurément ?”

“Oui, Aimée ! je suis triste, ennuyée.”

“Pas possible !” murmured the Abigail, wondering how anybody could be ennuyée who was young, beautiful, and rich like her mistress ; who was going to court, and to balls without number, and who, doubtless, would soon gather a legion of admirers,—the acmé of feminine felicity in Aimée’s French imagination.

“Comment trouvez-vous ces demoiselles Clare, Aimée ; sont-elles plus jolies qu’ autrefois, ou plus spirituelles ?” asked Maude, as her maid dressed her.

“Ni l’un ni l’autre, miladi :—elles sont bien Anglaise ! bien Anglaise !”

“Mais quoi, Aimée ? moi aussi, je suis Anglaise.”

“Ah ! oui ! mais vous méritez d’être Française, mademoiselle !”

“Merci du compliment, Aimée !” laughed Maude, who liked few things more than exciting her maid’s nationality.

The suite of rooms assigned to Maude con-

sisted of four: A pleasant boudoir, very chastely and newly decorated; a spacious sleeping apartment, with two smaller rooms opening beyond, one of which Aimée was to occupy, and the other was a dressing-room. The Clares had determined that their guest should not feel herself cramped in their house; and the younger branches calculated on the unlimited command of her equipage and horses in out-of-door pursuits, to compensate for the resignation of the gentlemen visitors, who at other times had occupied the rooms now given up to her. They all longed, besides, to be asked to Houghton Priory for the Christmas following, remembering with glee the rejoicings at Maude's coming of age: they felt sure that, with plenty of men, it would be a delightful house.

To compass so desirable an end as this coveted visit to Houghton, they thought nothing so likely to be successful as shewing infinite respect to the lady of the Priory, and making themselves oppressively polite and hospitable. And they began their persecutions at once; for scarcely was Maude dressed

and seated for a quiet half-hour by the half-closed curtains of her boudoir, looking over the fresh green of the park and at the late troops of equestrians slowly wending their ways to the gate, when there came a tiny rap at the door, and Ada Clare peeped in, *en grande toilette* and radiant with smiles.

“I was sure you would be dull, so I came to see you. I hate to be alone—don’t you?” she said, coming into the room, and depositing herself in an easy-chair at the other side of the window.

“I was watching the people in the Park,” said Maude.

“Ah! it is very pleasant when one cannot go out. There is Mr Warburton! do you see him, on the grey horse?”

“Whereabouts? I do not see him,” said Maude, leaning forward, her colour slightly raised.

“By the railings. Now he is coming this way with a lady: do you see him now?”

“Yes: Who is that lady? do you know her?”

“It is Miss Carey, a relative of Mrs Warburton,—fine figure of a woman, is she not?”

Maude tried to see the lady's face, but it was turned away, and the long plume of her hat drooped down over one side, shading it completely; but, as Ada Clare said, she was "a fine figure of a woman," and rode well. Somehow this vision of "Cousin Annie" did not raise Maude's spirits, and she leaned back in her chair when they were out of sight, having no longer any interest in the equestrian passers-by. She felt impatient for the morrow, when, in calling on Mrs Warburton, she might have an opportunity of seeing this "sweet Annie Carey." How very ingenious women are in tormenting themselves!

## CHAPTER IX.

## COMING OUT.

MAUDE TALBOT'S toilette was not to be compared in brilliance to that of Juliet Clare or Lady Clare, when, on the day succeeding her arrival in London, they went to call on Mrs Warburton. Indeed, Juliet's private thought on the subject was, that Maude looked dowdy and old fashioned. Now, this could never be ; for clothe herself as she would, Maude Talbot must inevitably have looked beautiful, and nothing else : but Juliet's taste leant to the rainbow and gossamer style ; one which, for out-of-door service, Maude could not be prevailed on to patronize. As it happened, she had been more particular than usual in the selection of her dress, and to any less prejudiced eyes, the



wreath of dark violets beneath a bonnet of white chip, and the dress of rich dark silk, with cashmere shawl, would have constituted a very charming toilette; but Juliet, in bonnet of pink crêpe, with marabout feathers and pigeon-breast-hued dress of silk, and gorgeous brocaded écharpe, felt that she quite eclipsed the lady of Houghton :—and so, in point of fact, she did. Happily for her self-satisfaction she did not observe the many curious and admiring glances directed at the new face in her mama's carriage. But Lady Clare did, and she began to doubt the policy of producing so beautiful a rival in the company of her daughters. The drive was silent enough, in consequence, for Juliet found occupation in recognizing her acquaintance; and if Maude Talbot's mental tablets could have been exposed, the text of her thoughts would have been discovered to be, "sweet Annie Carey,"—a most engrossing theme.

Mrs Warburton was "at home," and the ladies were ushered into the drawing-room; but to Maude's intense disappointment, it was occupied only by Mrs Warburton. Juliet

Clare's curiosity, however, prompted her to enquire for the lady whom she had seen riding with Mr Warburton the day before.

"Miss Carey is in town, is she not?" she asked.

"Yes, my niece has been so good as to give me her company. My son has but little time at his disposal now, and but for sweet Annie Carey, I must have many long, lonely evenings."

"Sweet Annie Carey, indeed!" echoed Lady Clare, with a dolorous wave of the head. "Ah! how beautiful she was! how much the rage during her first season! poor girl!"

I should be sorry to say how much comfort this speech of Lady Clare's carried with it to Maude Talbot's heart. How beautiful she *was*. What? was it possible that the glorious loveliness of the picture was a thing spoken of as gone bye—a thing of past days?

"She is, next to my son, the greatest comfort I have in the world," said Mrs Warburton, gently. "Neither prosperity nor adversity have had power to spoil her. She is still the same truthful, kindly creature she was in her idolized youth."

“ I do not see her much :—at the opera occasionally,” observed Lady Clare.

“ No, she goes out but little ; she devotes the greater part of her time to me. This morning she has accompanied Philip to the exhibition of paintings. You know my son, Lady Clare ?”

“ Intimately ; thanks to my husband’s late ward,” replied Lady Clare, smiling graciously on Maude ; who sat wishing that Philip and Miss Carey would come in, and feeling excessively anxious to know what this much admired’ young lady was like : for young, of course, she must be. Maude almost started from her chair when the street-bell rang violently, and steps began to ascend to the drawing-room. But a second disappointment awaited her : Mrs Dobbs of Eversleigh and her daughter Cecily were announced. The customary compliments disposed of, Cecily sat down by Juliet and Maude, and began to talk of their amusements, past and anticipated. She was really a pretty little thing, but very affected and silly.

“ You are going to be presented, are you

not? Yes, so am I. Won't it be nice?" she said, addressing Maude. "What shall you wear? Mama says the Houghton diamonds are splendid: diamonds are so nice, ar'nt they?"

Maude pleaded guilty to a weakness for diamonds.

"I am to go to the opera to-night: they say it will be so good. There is a new singer, a Signora something or other; but I don't much care for the singing: I like to see the people. You have not been to the opera, Miss Talbot, have you? It is so nice!"

"We are going this evening," replied Juliet. "Do you go to Lady Casterton's fête on Thursday? It will be so grand. I know several people who are dying to go."

Little Cecily Dobbs was obliged to confess that they were not in that set, which Juliet knew before; only she liked to mortify Cecily, because she was pretty. Cecily had her revenge, however.

"Lord Linnet dines with us to-day, and goes to the opera with us after."

Juliet could have poisoned her. Lady Clare overheard also, and began to fidget: she considered Lord Linnet as family property, and

was prepared to resent any attacks matrimonial on the little peer from other quarters. Cecily Dobbs stood in great awe of Lady Clare, and when she perceived the frown with which that lady regarded her, her little heart quivered with apprehension under her grey barège robe. Mrs Warburton and Mrs Dobbs were deep in the discussion of country matters, and the young ladies having exhausted their conversation, were anxious to separate and see somebody else ; so Juliet signalled to her mama, and they departed.

“ A very unsatisfactory visit ! Mrs Warburton is by no means a woman of the world ! ” said Lady Clare, drawing herself up majestically in the corner of the carriage.

Lord Linnet’s defection was at the bottom of her ill-humour.

“ I was not sorry Miss Carey was out ; there is something so grave about her,” said Juliet. “ How was it, mama, she lost her fortune ? ”

“ Her father left her property in the hands of speculative guardians. For one season she was the greatest beauty and heiress in town. She left London engaged to the Mar-

quis of Salford, and was considered the first match in England. Then her property, by some inexplicable entanglement, was lost: one of her guardians disappeared, the other died suddenly; her estates were sold, and it was found that of her magnificent property, not a tithe remained. The Marquis would have gladly fulfilled his engagement, but the old Duke of Netherby, whose extravagances have been something unparalleled, would not hear of such a sacrifice; so his son went to the East for a year or two, and Miss Carey took refuge with Mrs Warburton:—that is the long and the short of the story.

“Is not the Marquis a very tall, sunburnt man, whom one sees at the opera with the Howards, and never anywhere else?”

“Yes, he is very retiring and exclusive, but not a man easily mistaken. What a pity it is his fine estates are so encumbered, that whenever he marries, it must be a fortune.”

Maude Talbot's heart began to soften towards “sweet Annie Carey,” and her curiosity to increase.

They drove to the Park. This to Juliet

was the high road of happiness, but to Maude the crowd of strange faces was bewildering.

Juliet chattered incessantly.

“ There is the Castertons. Oh ! what a fright ! Vache espagnole ! Did you ever see such a bonnet, mama ?—à la madame Noah ! Did you think Cecy Dobbs looking well to-day ? I thought her positively hideous. Mama, there is Lord Linnet—Billy Button riding to Brentford ! How can such a poppet be so absurd as to stick himself on that tall horse ? Did you ever see such a comical little figure ? Oh ! dear ! he is coming this way.”

Juliet smoothed her face into a fashionable insipidity, as the young peer came up beside the carriage.

“ Oh ! ah ! Hot day, very hot : how do, Miss Juliet ?” lisped the tiny lord, without once removing his round greenish eyes from Maude’s face, where they had fixed themselves as soon as he had caught sight of her. “ Sir James well, hope ? Go to th’ opera to-night ? Grisi fine singer—fine woman too.”

“ Yes : are you ?” briefly asked Juliet.

“ Ah ! Oh, yes ! I think I shall look in for

half an hour or so. That Dobbs girl asked me : s'pose I must go."

"Oh! fie! to speak of pretty Cecy as 'that Dobbs girl.'"

"Oh! ah! Miss Juliet, they are not my set: but as you say, Cecy is pretty."

Juliet looked vinegar and verjuice at him. Lord Linnet saw he had said something wrong, and he stammered worse than ever.

"Why, they say she is pretty; but I don't like those dollish, painted-looking trifles." And the peer grinned at his own puny wit. Juliet was mollified, and smiled too.

"Here is Salford coming: do you know him? You should. He just asked me who you were: asked me to introduce him. Is it agreeable, Lady Clare?" still with his eyes on Maude's face. Lady Clare bowed a gracious assent, and in return for his good-nature, presented him to Maude.

Linnet cantered off to Salford, and, returning to the carriage, performed the ceremony of introduction, placing himself by Juliet, and leaving to the Marquis the side on which sate Maude.



The two latter were soon engaged in conversation. The Marquès of Salford had known her father in Italy, and this was a link of friendship at once: Maude always loved to hear her father spoken of. Always critical in beauty, the noble type of the features of her new acquaintance struck Maude at once. How fine a creature Annie Carey must have been to fix the affections of such a man, she felt at once. Perhaps the favourable opinion she formed of him was in some degree influenced by his scarcely-veiled admiration of herself; though, if Maude could have guessed why he had sought her acquaintance, she would not have been greatly flattered. It was neither more nor less than because, in the bright young face, seen for the first time in the motley ranks of the Park, he thought he detected some resemblance to that of Annie Carey in the days of their passion. Of course Maude Talbot did not suspect this; and as she conversed on persons and places mutually known, her deep eyes lighted up, and the soft tint on her cheek glowing with animation, lessened the likeness: that expression of pride

and conscious beauty was not in Annie Carey's face; and, with a sigh, the man of forty years thought how difficult it was to find any face to equal that with which the love of his early days was enshrined.

Lady Clare, reclining in the corner of her luxurious carriage, was in a state of great beatitude. She had already (mentally) led the Marquis of Salford and her husband's late ward in triumph to the altar, and presented the fair hand of Juliet to Lord Linnet. Like a sensible woman, she did not aspire to things out of her reach, and so lose all: she did not despise small things. For her own children she knew the ducal coronet unattainable, but for Maude Talbot she devoutly believed nothing too exalted; therefore, in the gratified feeling which pervaded her heart at this introduction to a person whom she had rarely met and never hoped to know, she did not fancy that her own charms had wrought the good deed, but gave the credit where it was due: namely, to her young guest's beauty. And this event rather increased than lessened her urbanity to Lord Linnet, whom Juliet, to her

shame be it spoken, felt rather inclined to snub, whilst the tall aristocratic Marquis was in attendance on them; but her politic mama frowned her resolutely into propriety of demeanour.

Lady Clare was a perfectly happy woman when the Marquis requested permission to call occasionally in Park Lane. She granted the request with the most amiable dignity, and gave the order to drive home with a pleasant flutter at her heart, which told her she was the most fortunate of mamas and chaperons.

Maude, too, had some busy thoughts in her head, which Juliet hastened to unravel for her as soon as they reached home, and were cosily seated in the boudoir. This time her chatter was more welcome.

“Fortunate girl!” exclaimed Juliet, “to think that your very first appearance should enlist such an admirer in your train. So exclusive, too, as he is, and so proud! He has been heard to say there is but one woman in the world he could ever wish to marry, and that one he could not have: I think you will make him change his opinion, Maude.”

“ Pray, do not indulge yourself in any visions on my account,” replied Maude laughing: “ I have no ambition to be any woman's successor.”

“ Oh ! you would be all women's envy !” exclaimed Juliet, gaily.

“ That is a strange kind of inducement, certainly,” laughed Maude.

“ Well, we shall see. He is to call here, and mama wants to ask him to dine ; but papa won't like it : he never can get on with those very aristocratic people ; but on your account he will not mind it.”

“ I should not wish to put Sir James to the slightest inconvenience. Oh, Juliet ! how very soon you precise girls wind up matters for your acquaintance. I daresay now, in your own mind, you have settled what you will wear on the momentous occasion that transforms me from Maude Talbot into Marchioness of Salford, although we have been introduced to him only this afternoon, and have only talked for the space of twenty minutes.”

“ To be sure I have ! What would become of us, butterflies of fashion, if we might not

build castles in the air for ourselves and our friends? I assure you it is my chief business. When I am at a ball I do it; all the morning during visits, which are generally so tedious; in the Park, the gardens, everywhere: even when mama thinks I am studying that botany book, which is to make me an agreeable companion to my Lord Linnet, poor little goose! at the next horticultural fête."

"Is it possible that you can think of marrying a man you plainly despise?"

"Assuredly—if he give me the chance. It is our vocation: we must either marry, or sink down into old maidism and obscurity; for which I at least have no taste. Papa can only give us moderate fortunes: we can never play the part of Châtelaines; as you, Lady of Houghton, can do, in great state, married or single. I myself am of an independent spirit, but I shall have no objection to be turned into Lady Linnet or Lady Anything-else very speedily. We are none of us so young as we have been, you know: Sara is very near old-maid's corner."

"Then I wish you success in your wooing.

Lord Linnet is an inoffensive little man, it seemed to me. But whilst you are plotting, why not make the coronet-matrimonial of Netherby the object of your schemes, at once?"

"Why not? because I have more sense, to be sure. Salford is a man of experience: a man who has loved Annie Carey will not give her a Juliet Clare for a successor."

"You are modest in your estimate of your own merits, at all events," said Maude, laughing quietly.

"Well, there is no use pretending that I think myself handsome, for I do not: but you, if you like—if you will take the trouble, at least—may be Salford's wife, or anybody else's. You know there is no better blood in England than yours; that your fortune has few equals; and as for your beauty, your glass must be far more eloquent on that subject than I can be."

"Anybody's wife!" echoed Maude, with a faint blush, and an "*arrière pensée*."

"Yes! anybody's wife. Tell me, have you a heart pre-occupied?" asked Juliet, half-jestingly, laying her hand on that of her com-

panion. Maude put it away with a haughty gesture; but instantly she recovered herself with a smile, and Juliet, who felt piqued at her first movement, smiled too.

“ I promise, when I have anything to communicate on that score, I will make you my confidante.”

“ Now, let us dismiss that subject—it is exhausted—and shew me your diamonds. I suppose Madam Lugon will have to be consulted about your court-dress soon ?”

“ Come, then, I will show you them; and then, as we dine early to go to the opera after, I must ring for Aimée to dress me.”

Just at this moment Sara and Ada Clare came to the door; they were admitted to the exhibition of the jewels, and made a tremendous display of feminine admiration and covetousness thereat. Juliet wondered if the Linnet diamonds were good—she loved diamonds so. What a singular thing it is that women have such a passion for those sparkling bits of white and tinted stone! Certainly the three Misses Clare quitted Maude Talbot's room grievously guilty of the sin of coveting

their neighbour's goods, and particularly envious of all the blessings, personal and temporal, with which nature and fortune had endowed her.



## CHAPTER X.

### LOVE VERSUS AMBITION.

MAUDE's first impression of the opera was excessive admiration and delight. The Clares were evidently amused at her unfeigned and undissembled emotion,—it was so very long since they had cared for those mimic joys and sorrows. Juliet whispered to her in vain, as long as the music was going forward, to look at “that odious Cecy Dobbs, tricked out in bright blue satin, flirting so abominably with Lord Linnet,” and another young man of the same stamp.

Presently the curtain fell. Maude turned to Juliet with tears in her eyes: “How beautiful!” she exclaimed.

“Yes, very,” replied Juliet carelessly:

“ now, as the main attraction is gone, perhaps you will condescend to come down from the clouds and look at the people about us. Look at that ‘ Dobbs girl !’ as Linnet called her this morning.”

“ I don’t care much for Cecy Dobbs : she looks excessively triumphant,” replied Maude.

“ What a doll it is ! I wonder what the men see about her to like so much : she is a little uncultivated, countryfied thing !” said Juliet spitefully, looking across to Cecy Dobbs.

“ The men ! say ‘ the boys’ rather,” replied Maude, laughing.

“ Juliet, is not that Miss Carey who has just come into the Lauderdales’ box ?” asked Lady Clare, bending forward to speak to her daughter.

“ Yes, mama : who would think she had ever been the great beauty people say ?”

Maude followed the direction of Juliet’s glance, and her curiosity was at length satisfied by beholding the original of the portrait in the gallery at the Manor,—“ Sweet Annie Carey.” The young beauty heaved a sigh of relief. Positively this “ Cousin Annie” was

no longer young :—she was merely the faded shadow of a woman lovely ten years before. She looked older than she was : her face was very pale and placid, the features sharpened, but the expression peculiarly good ; her hair, not in the golden floods of the picture, was braided smoothly away from the rather hollow cheek ; and her figure was exceedingly thin. Few people, in seeing her for the first time, could be brought to believe how exquisite her beauty had once been. Maude wondered how her jealous fears had raised this unknown and *passée* woman into a rival : her heart was sensibly lightened, and she listened with complacency to the observations of Juliet and Ada Clare.

“ There is the Marquis of Salford,—there.”

Maude’s eye followed Juliet’s again. He was standing rather in shadow, behind two ladies ; but Maude could see that he was looking at the box where Annie Carey sat. She seemed unconscious of being watched, and was sitting with her eyes fixed on the stage. What a worn, white face it looked amongst the blooming ones around her ! When

the curtain drew up, and the voice of the favourite singer sounded thrillingly in a most sad and passionate song, there was a glimmering of emotion about it: though she had heard it a hundred times, it always touched her home.

Maude could see the quivering of the depressed eyelids, and the handkerchief passed often and nervously before the trembling lips. Happy heart yours, Maude, that finds matter for wonder in seeing that faded woman stirred by the remembrance of the sorrows of her youth! Immediately the opera was ended, Miss Carey and the lady who accompanied her took their departure. How sorry Maude began to feel for "sweet Annie Carey," now that all jealous fear had left her thoughts!

"My dears," whispered Lady Clare, "we will go now."

The Clare girls petitioned for a little longer.

"Perhaps Lord Linnet may get away from the Dobbs now," suggested Juliet, shrewdly.

Lady Clare acquiesced, and, though very tired and sleepy, she endeavoured to look pleasant. Her amiability met with its de-

served reward; for by-and-bye Lord Linnet did come round, accompanied by the Marquis looking a shade less gloomy and proud than he had done whilst contemplating Annie Carey. Maude felt flattered by his attention; for his evident object in coming round to their box was, not to cultivate the acquaintance of Lady Clare, or even of her charming Juliet, but to converse again with the very brilliant girl who had attracted him during the morning. Even her face he inly acknowledged to be lovely; now lighted up, animated, yet soft, —lovely enough almost to bear comparison with that beauty whose faded relics had filled his gaze but half an hour before.

In every woman's nature there is a natural love of power, more or less developed. Now, this passion in Maude Talbot was strong; so it came to pass that she, by various little arts, which none knew better than she did how to exercise, the austere, middle-aged nobleman was converted into her very sincere admirer: after placing her in the carriage, and bowing his adieus, he took his way homewards with various conflicting thoughts in his mind,

the uppermost of which was the possibility of giving her for a successor to Annie Carey.

If Maude could have known whose eyes were witnesses of the greater part of her flirtation with the Marquis of Salford, it is probable that her satisfaction would have been sensibly lessened. As luck would have it, Philip Warburton had come to Lady Lauderdale's box, to join his cousin's party and take her home, about five minutes after they had left the house. He saw the two gentlemen enter Lady Clare's box; saw Maude's smiling welcome of the fastidious Marquis; saw the proud assiduity with which he led her to the carriage: saw all — himself unseen. With very tumultuous and passionate feelings indeed, did he hurry through the streets; not reflecting how easy it would have been to join them himself, and so secure Maude's society for a while:—but something in her manner had struck him as different from her usual character; perceptible to eyes jealous through love, but perceptible to none beside. He felt dissatisfied with himself for not addressing her;—dissatisfied with her for that

display of feminine coquetry which had held him back ;—dissatisfied in the very highest degree with the Marquis of Salford, for presuming to make her acquaintance ;—dissatisfied with everything in general, and with his own prospects in particular.

Whilst Philip Warburton, jaded and unhappy, was taking the longest way home on foot, in hopes of cooling his fevered brain, Maude was ensconced in the easiest of easy-chairs in her dressing-room ; a white, loose dressing-gown wrapped round her, disencumbered of satin, and blond, and ornaments ; her long hair twisted in thick plaits round her head, and covered with a lace *bonnet-de-nuit* ; her small feet thrust into a pair of daintily-embroidered slippers, and resting on a soft cushion before the fire. There was a single wax-light burning on the table ; the door to her sleeping-room was open ; Aimée was dismissed for the night. Maude looked round : all was quiet, solitary, luxurious. A great mirror reflected the half-lighted room ; the shadows cast by the flickering fire-light danced and wavered on its surface ; the room looked

over the Park, so that all was perfectly still : only the striking of a great clock in the hall made a break in it sometimes. Maude was meditative : resting her dimpled chin on her clasped white hands, she fixed her eyes on the bright fire.

Miriam Sedley was not the only woman in the world given to day-dreaming. In Maude Talbot's mind, as she sat there in the seclusion of her dressing-room, were two deep shadows ;—each the deeper for the other's presence. Strange to say, these shadows were the invisible presences of the man whom she loved, and the man whose position it had become her ambition to share : and the one thought warred with the other.

I suppose it will be considered well-nigh impossible that so young a girl should sit down to count the cost between rank and happiness, before either had been proffered to her acceptance. But in Maude Talbot's disposition there was a measure of determination, —a resolution that would send her straight to her proposed end, whatsoever that end might be ; and now, in the night stillness of her



chamber, she took counsel with her own heart as to what that end should be.

Two futures were before her. The one fitted for her in all respects:—so the world would say at least:—a man of middle age and experience to temper her youth; handsome, respected, good, generous, hospitable, titled; commanding the highest ranks in the realm; of descent equal almost to her own, and of a right honourable race; with great estates, which her superfluous wealth would disencumber; noble residences in three counties, a magnificent mansion in town, a ducal coronet, diamonds which would double the Houghton heir-looms; and last, not least, the praise and envy of that loud-tongued jade, yclept the World:—for does she not invariably praise those who do well for themselves?

The other,—a man whose age was ten years or more beyond her own; one whose origin could be traced no further back than his grandfather. And what was he? A cotton lord,—no more. Honourable, truly, was Philip Warburton; and that by no honour of descent or title, but by his own worth and the voices

of his fellow-men:—honourable as the old roots of many a degenerate yet decorated race ;—for aught Maude can tell, the progenitor of one of those lines of illustrious men whose names are landmarks in the maze of history. She reflects deliberately. Those two men are before her :—the one a type of the aristocratic Norman blood, brave, gentle, and courtly ;—the other, a new-risen leader of the new-risen race, the nobility of labour.

The former known in the circle of his peers, a man of taste and rank ; the latter, a household word in city homes and lonely hamlets. One recognised, courted ; a great man amongst great men ; the other, obscure in his untitled worth. But oh ! the world,—which is its favourite ? The man of many descents, surely :—the man who quarters the royal arms with his ? Yes, the world is for him ;—and Maude sides with the world.

Yes, Maude Talbot sided with the world. We will not go deeper into her heart now ; as yet it is but a girl's waking dream, of which she may repent : which may not darken into a real thing. Perhaps as yet she ignores the pangs

that may be wrung out of her soul by that condemned love. Ah, me! that such knowledge is bought only by suffering.

As the fire goes down she feels cold and shivers; the mirror looks dark and mysterious with the faint gleaming taper before it; and the depths of the room seem filled with vague, beckoning shadows. She rises, shakes off the superstitious feeling, and crosses the dressing-room to her bed. Strange that sleep does not come!—she is weary, body and mind. No wonder, Maude! love and ambition are no cradling spirits, but very thorns in the pillow. The time of trouble draws on when the heart cannot rest: this is its foreshadow.

At last an uneasy slumber comes over her, troubled with oppressive dreams. She weeps, tosses her arms, struggles as against some frightful nightmare: and so the night passes. When the sun peers through the curtains into the chamber, she wakes unrefreshed, and with a weight on her spirits, the precursor of trouble. It is useless to try and sleep again, and she takes up the broken thread of her reflections of the past night; and as she thinks, dangers

and difficulties vanish, and all is again bright as the morning. She wonders if Philip Warburton will come that day: hopes he will not, for it is vain to increase sorrow by fostering love to disappoint it. And the sigh which follows that thought comes up from the lowest depths of her heart. Poor Philip! Poor Maude!

When Aimée came to the bedside, she saw how little her young mistress had slept; but having begun to suspect how it was with her, she refrained from ill-timed enquiries; and giving into her hand three letters, which had come during the morning—for Maude had given orders not to be awake until eleven, and it was something after that hour—she went into the dressing-room to prepare for her lady's toilette. Maude turned the letters over in her hand before opening any of them. One was from Lettice, the second from Mrs Powys, and the third was directed in Philip Warburton's bold characters. This last, being a mere note, Maude opened first.

It consisted of not more than six lines: saying, that he would do himself the honour of

calling upon her at two ; and making polite enquiries after her health. If Maude had known the temper of mind in which those few lines had been written, she would probably have re-read them with more interest than she did ; for in that interview, which Philip meant to be a private one, he had resolved to put his fortune to the test : not to be the mere dangler on a woman's caprice. How his resolve was defeated, we shall know by and by.

Maude always kept her ex-guardian's letters, and this note was to be no exception : she refolded it, and proceeded to a perusal of the letter from Lettice. It was a long, rambling, childish epistle, detailing all their doings at Houghton since her sister's departure two days before. I hope the reader has some feeling for that pretty little child, and that he or she will be glad to have the news from the Priory through the medium of her letter. It began—

“ MY DEAR, DEAR SISTER MAUDE—We want you back very much already. I read your letter all through, about the pretty rooms and the Park, and the people on horseback ; and I

do hope I shall have another very soon. Yesterday morning it was so fine, that my good Miss Sedley let me off my lessons—every one—that we might go to the Nun's Well. And who do you think went with us? You will never guess! It was Mr Evelyn. I am afraid I was very naughty, and teased him shockingly; but I persuaded him it could not be well for him to live always in that dreary library; so he put away a great folio, which he had just dragged down from the very top shelf of all, and went with us. And Flossy went too. And, oh! Maude, he was so very bad: there were a quantity of blue-bells out, it looked quite like a field of blue—far more blue than it was yellow in daffodil time in the woods. First of all he went mad, and ran round and round, as if he were trying to catch his own tail, and then he scampered off amongst the blue-bells; and twice he hunted young rabbits! Then, whenever I tried to gather a flower, he would be polite, and bite it off for me. And, last of all, we met the butcher's dog from Eversleigh, and Flossy, as usual, insulted him grievously, and the great dog shook

him. Poor Flossy did not recover his temper all day, and kept barking cross little barks in his sleep, as if he were dreaming the shaking over again.

“ When we arrived at the Nun’s Pool, Miss Sedley and Mr Evelyn talked wise, and I gathered flowers to make crowns ; and I put one on Mr Evelyn’s hat, and I do not think he would have found it out if I had not taken it off myself. Then Linwood came with some luncheon for us, and soon after we set off home again, stopping by the way whenever there was anything to see. We met Mr Tempest, and he contradicted Mr Evelyn twice, and Miss Sedley once. He is going to London soon, he says. That is all about the walk to the Nun’s Well.

“ Soon after you left, two little girls came, wishing to speak to you : their name was Jefferson. They were very clean, pretty little girls. One of them seemed fit to cry, when Miss Sedley—for we were in the Park and met them—told them that you were gone away for a month ; but the other said it could not be helped ; and perhaps if you were at home you could not prevent them going to the town ; so

maybe it is not of much consequence that they did not see you, if you could do nothing for them.

“Miss Sedley is going to sing for me when I have finished my letter. Maude, is she happy? I feel as if she were very old and desolate: I should like to love her very much; but something in her face keeps me back. Can you read faces? I think I can read her’s sometimes. She sends her love, and Flossy sends many affectionate wags of his tail; and I send a great many kisses to you, and one apiece to all the Clares, and Aimée, and Saunders; and I hope you are happy. Linwood lets me sit up until nine; so now I have half-an-hour’s sweet music to hear, for it is just half-past eight. Good-bye, my dear Sister; your loving

“LETTICE.”

“P.S.—Tell Mr Philip Warburton that I intended to give you into his care; but as he disappointed me about going to the Nun’s Well, I do not think him fit to undertake so precious a charge. My love to him and Lupa.”



The second letter, from Mrs Powys, ran as follows. It was forwarded from Houghton :—

“MY DEAR YOUNG FRIEND—I am in great hopes that I shall see you at the Court before you go to London, for I have a tale to unfold of grief and misery extreme, amongst your poor tenantry in this part of the town. Your man-of-business cannot possibly have made himself acquainted with a tenth part of it, or he would certainly have applied to you for funds to alleviate the distresses of the very poorest. The high price of provisions, and the scarcity of labour, is one cause ; but another is, that there is a terrible fever raging amongst them ; and of cholera cases, the weekly returns rapidly increase. More I will tell you when we meet.

“My great crony here is a certain old retainer of your family—which she venerates—named Martha. She entertains me with lengthy histories of the times when the Court stood amidst fields and woods. I feel quite juvenile again in listening to her old-world narratives. You must know her : you will appreciate her staunch adherence to your race thoroughly.

My rheumatism has not troubled me much of late : patience and new flannel have put my enemy to the rout. How is my sweet pet, Lettice? She is a delicate plant, Maude ; mind well how you guard her. Miss Sedley will be invaluable to her. Every one here speaks of her with devotion : she is Martha's supreme favourite. Indeed, for a while, the worthy woman looked on me, as her successor in the Oriel Chamber, with manifest dislike ; but I flatter myself she regards me more amicably now. And Flossy, Aimée, Saunders, and Mr Evelyn, I trust they are all well : remember me kindly to each and all. Will you drive in some morning soon, and bring dear Lettice and Miss Sedley ? I must see you before you go up to town. And now, my dear love, praying God to have you in His good keeping, I must end my letter. Yours very sincerely,

“ ELLEN POWYS.”

“ How very careless of me to forget to go over to see her, dear old thing ! I will write this very day. Aimée, remind me to write to Mrs Powys to-day. I will get up now.” Aimée turned round.

“ I will, ma’am. Pray, ma’am, how is Miss Lettice ?”

“ She writes in high spirits: well, no doubt—blessed child ! and Mrs Powys is well too. She has got rid of her old complaint, the rheumatism.”

We will leave Maude, assisted by Aimée, making a very quiet, though *soignée* toilette, while we descend with Juliet Clare to her mama’s boudoir. Sara is there, looking very cross and plain, with Lady Clare in much the same mood. They are both busy directing cards for their grand ball, which is to take place in a fortnight.

“ Come and help us, Juliet ; Ada is practising in the drawing-room, and there are at least fifty cards to fill up yet,” said Sara.

“ You must excuse me: I must practise that duet. Lord Linnet is coming this morning, and he is sure to ask if I have done so: he has a dreadful memory. But I will send Ada to you.”

So saying Miss Juliet swept out of the room. Sara looked crosser than ever; but her mama smiled blandly.

“ I have every reason to believe, my dear, that your sister will shortly become Lady Linnet.”

“ Indeed ! I always thought Juliet’s flirtations came to nothing,” replied Sara, with a slight spice of acrimony in her tone ; for it was not agreeable to have her younger sister’s brilliant prospects set in such dazzling array just before her eyes.

Lady Clare, under the circumstances, forgave her ; but in her heart she devoutly wished some body would come and marry her out of hand, before her temper became unmitigated acid.

“ Have you written a card for the Marquis, my dear—and the Warburtons—and Miss Carey ?”

“ Do you think it expedient, mama, that with your designs for Miss Talbot in that quarter, those two should meet ? ”

“ Assuredly not, Sara ; yet we must pay her the compliment notwithstanding : it is not likely Mrs Warburton will accept ; and when Miss Carey knows of the coming of the Marquis, she will certainly decline also. Mr War-

burton, however, is a most eligible person, and he will certainly come. You must be agreeable to him, Sara; he is a very excellent man: on the whole, I prefer him to the Marquis."

"Then, mama, you make quite sure that *he* will come?"

"No one who had witnessed his very marked attention to Miss Talbot could doubt it. You cannot imagine how supremely beautiful she looked last night. Everybody was staring at our box; and her heiress-ship seemed no way unconscious of the admiration she excited. She will be the fashion, you will see."

"Madame Luçon will be here at half-past twelve about her dress for the drawing-room, I suppose? We have come to the end of the list, mama."

Sara then laid down her pen with a gesture of extreme weariness; and having left a lighted taper by her mama, wherewith to seal the whole pile of invitations, she sailed away to her own room to consult her maid about the renovation of some evening dresses; to which delectable entertainment we will resign her.

Maude Talbot, in the meantime, had joined

the younger sisters in the drawing-room, where the practising was going forward ; and occasionally her glorious voice joined in with the thin wiry tones of Ada and Juliet, making them feel very envious, and finally determining them to leave the instrument:—an effect which it was Maude's intention to produce, for she wanted Juliet to talk to ; having settled in her own mind that that young lady was less of a dragon than formerly, and quite conversible. There were some glimmerings of hope for Ada, who was not more than five and twenty ; but Sara was utterly and completely odious.

Maude was doing some of that trifling work which young ladies always have in their fingers. Her sleepless night had given a touch of langour to her manner, and a fainter bloom to her cheek. These matters had been considered in her dress ; and as Juliet turned from the pianoforte, and saw her bent head and half-reclining figure, she most devoutly hoped that no unlucky wind would blow Lord Linnet that way until Maude had departed.

Alas for Juliet's hopes ! Scarcely were the

three girls seated in close conclave, discussing the respective merits of their acquaintance, when the door opened, and Lord Linnet was announced. His first words were a stammered apology for the unseemly hour of his visit; but Juliet, he was persuaded, would forgive him, as it was on her account he came. He was right: Juliet would have forgiven him anything; but she thought it was rather an odd and abrupt way to announce his business.

After this apology, the conversation diverged into various channels. There was a boyish softness about the little lord which made him quite at home wherever he went. Presently, music having become the theme of discussion, he asked Juliet to sing, then Ada, and next Maude; at last he himself sang a funny little song all about love and roses, without much tune, and with no time worth speaking of.

In the midst of the last performance, Lady Clare came in, her maternal heart glowing with satisfaction at seeing this object of her ambition, as it were, domesticated in her family: and the beatified expression of Juliet's coun-

tenance confirmed and strengthened the glow. She begged Lord Linnet to join them at luncheon. He did not care if he did, was his reply, and the party adjourned to the dining-room: all but Maude, who was summoned to an interview with Madame Luçon. Never was such momentous business so speedily dispatched, for two o'clock was approaching. The milliner was dismissed; and Maude having eaten a biscuit and sipped some wine and water, returned to the drawing-room, which was empty. Presently, however, the whole family, Sir James included, came in; about five minutes after, Mr Warburton was announced.

Philip Warburton's countenance was not one to betray its owner in general, but certainly, when he saw this extensive family meeting, he looked somewhat disconcerted. His entrée excited various sensations. The Clares universally were benignant; Maude was troubled at his tired, jaded aspect, and curious to know its cause; and poor Linnet felt particularly uncomfortable, for Mr Warburton had once given him what he considered a severe rat-



ing, when his Lordship, just emancipated from Eton, had ventured to give a very illiberal and decided opinion on a political point which happened to be the question in their company. Since this occurrence the young aristocrat had held himself as far aloof as possible from the great leader of the popular party.

Almost in a breath, Lady Clare asked of the new comer where he had been, when he came to town, where he was going, and if he stayed in London till Parliament closed ; to all of which enquiries he gave answers quite as near the truth as could be expected, seeing that the baronet's wife was not his confessor.

. “ Mr Warburton, is that your horse at our door—a dappled grey?” asked Juliet, who with her juvenile adorer, had retired to a window in the small drawing-room.

It was.

“ A fine animal !” exclaimed the young lady, admiringly. Juliet 'thought herself a judge of horse-flesh. Lord Linnet, in a whisper, asked her if she rode that afternoon.

“ Miss Talbot, will you ride to-day?” asked Juliet, looking away to their guest.

“ I ordered my horse at four,” was the reply. Philip Warburton’s countenance brightened visibly. Juliet delighted Lord Linnet by saying she should ride also ; and he, with a fervent pressure of the hand, said he hoped to see her in the Park, and bowed himself to the door, and out of it. Scarcely had he got half way down the stairs, when he rushed back again, and into the room, exclaiming at the top of his small voice,—

“ Oh ! Miss Juliet, I forgot the great business of my coming to-day.” He fumbled in his coat pockets, first one and then the other, in search of some article that *would* not be found, whilst Juliet grew very hot and red, at what she considered his excessive stupidity ; for she had taken it into her head that this business was neither more nor less than the offer of his person and fortune. The forgotten thing was found at last, and proved to be a small three-cornered note, with which the young lady retreated to the inner room. Lord Linnet, reminding her of her promise to ride at four, and telling her to be sure and not forget, evaporated once more from the room.

With tremulous hands Juliet broke the seal of the mysterious little note, and after glancing at it for a second, she threw it down on the window-ledge with a look of unutterable disgust. Lady Clare was watching her daughter furtively, and seeing by her sudden gesture that there was no agreeable communication to receive, she kept her seat, and joined in the conversation with Mr Warburton. He was just telling Maude of some improvements which had been suggested to him for the Manor, and which it was his intention to carry into execution as soon as his parliamentary duties permitted his return to the country.

“ I thought your place was perfection already,” exclaimed Sara Clare. “ I am sure, from Miss Talbot’s glowing description, we may suppose so.”

“ Miss Talbot is, or ought to be, a judge : Houghton is beautiful,” replied Mr Warburton.

“ Ah ! I have not seen Houghton,” replied Sara, in a tone of regret.

“ Next Christmas I intend to fill the Priory with people ; then, Sara, you will see it in its

best estate, if you are not too much absorbed elsewhere. I hope you will, one and all, honour Houghton with your company," said Maude gaily.

"How delightful! oh, how very charming!" rapturously chorussed the ladies, whilst Sir James bowed politely, and told her nothing could please him better, for he understood from his friend Colonel Tempest that it was a capital hunting country. Mr Warburton confirmed the statement.

"You hunt, Mr Warburton?" interrogated Juliet, who had rejoined the circle.

"Rarely: I used to do when I was younger; but I have other game in view now than such as our woods and moors afford," replied Philip.

"Very true, very true," murmured Lady Clare sympathetically, glancing at the jaded countenance of the "rising man," as if she attributed his apparent illness to overwork, whereas it proceeded entirely from anxiety of mind and a sleepless night. The good lady began to feel very tender towards him; the more especially as she had observed him looking continually at her daughter Sara:—a fact of

which that young lady had manifested a pleasing consciousness by sundry little bridlings of the head and drawings up of her angular figure. It is true that Philip regarded her; but it was merely to contrast in his own mind the spare form of Sara Clare with the delicate but rounded contour of Maude.

What a comfortable thing for our self-love it is, that we so readily misinterpret people's attention! Sara Clare had not for months felt so thoroughly satisfied as whilst undergoing this disparaging contrast with Maude Talbot; but unhappily the expression it communicated to her face was more unpleasant to behold than her ordinary smile of frigid complacency. Philip's mental ejaculation concerning her was, "What an extraordinarily plain woman!" Not that he suffered it to appear in his manner that he thought so: certainly not. He was deferential in his demeanour towards all women; and probably that was the secret of his popularity with the sex.

Altogether, when, having discovered that it was hopeless to imagine he should see Maude

for a moment unsurrounded by her friends, he took his departure, he left a most favourable impression on the minds of all the three young ladies Clare. Maude felt rather dissatisfied, but hoped that, as he had heard her say she should ride at four, he would take the opportunity of talking to her then in the old familiar style of Houghton days. The Marquis of Salford would have had a poor chance with Maude, if Philip Warburton had told his tale while her heart was dwelling on the impression of his pale, weary face.

“Juliet, what was in the bit of paper that Lord Linnet was so particular about giving you to-day?” asked Ada maliciously, as soon as Mr Warburton was gone: for the younger sister saw traces of disappointment and ill-humour in her elder, and rather liked a little bantering in a polite way.

“Only the botanical names of some plants which I was puzzled about at the time of the last show: I could not recollect them, so he promised to write them out for me,” replied Juliet, with wonderful temper.

A prolonged “Oh!” was all the answer

elicited from Ada ; if we except a very faint curl of the upper lip, which she could use with peculiar effect. Lady Clare telegraphed a frown across to her young daughter, and then, with a motherly heaving of disappointment agitating her ample bosom, retired to her boudoir to muse over her Juliet's prospects.

Maude for a little while endured the vapid sentimentalisms of the girls, and then she too lounged off to her own room, to wait for the hour of four ; and, perhaps, to gather by reflection strength to baffle the powerful love struggling in her heart against her worldly pride. The whole scheme of the night before had to be gone over again,—the fors and againsts ; and, as might be expected, the result was still the same :—the determination to sacrifice affection to station no whit the weaker. When she mounted her horse at the door with Juliet Clare, Lady Clare, looking down from the windows above on the well-modelled, set countenance, shadowed by a broad hat and a plume of black feathers, could not help exclaiming, to herself, “That is a proud woman !” and

with something of joy in her mind, she looked at the expressionless, unmarked face of Juliet, and thanked Heaven that she, and not the glorious Maude Talbot, was her daughter.

And as Maude rode on, calm, self-possessed, looking straight forward, rather at the visionary end of her ambition than the visible objects before her, the crowd of fashionable people who stared eagerly at the face new in their moving ranks, pronounced her a magnificent creature, a splendid woman every inch of her, worthy the good blood from which she sprang. Juliet was delighted ; for this attraction was reflected on her, and she bowed right and left to her many acquaintances, with a smile more benignant and beaming than usual. Once, in the distance, Maude was sure she did not mistake the figure of Mr Warburton on horseback ; but at the moment, they were joined by Sir James Clare, Lord Linnet, and the Marquis of Salford.

Sir James was in the seventh heaven of contentment, for Lord Linnet had just done the proper thing, and asked if he might be permitted to address Miss Juliet Clare as his



future wife. To be sure the Park was rather a queer place to make such a confidence in the father of a family; but nobody thought anything of the juvenile peer's eccentricities, and, be sure, Sir James was in no mood to quarrel with them. He would willingly have cantered off home at once, to make his dearly beloved spouse a sharer in his knowledge; but there was something very delightful in watching Juliet's smiles and blushes, as she listened to the profuse nonsense of her *futur*. Then the Marquis and Miss Talbot seemed so engaged in conversation, and looked so divinely matched. Sir James had a quick eye for feminine beauty, and his late ward's had struck him almost as forcibly as his colleague.

Meanwhile, Maude smiled gracious smiles on the heir of Netherby, who looked the admiration he felt; while passers-by, old and young, married and single, made their comments, and circulated their modicum of scandal; wondered, and sneered, and envied.

Maude was more awake to passing occurrences than was her assiduous attendant; for

she was watching, half hoping, yet half dreading, to encounter Mr Warburton. All at once he came upon them, with Miss Carey riding beside him. The rencontre was impossible to be avoided. Philip bowed gravely, raised his hat, and passed on; but the sudden sight of her old lover seemed to transfix Annie Carey. For an instant she checked her horse;—just long enough to give to his eye the pale, worn cheek, the gleaming gold hair, ruffled by the wind, and she was gone.

No one, perhaps, but himself and Maude had seen the sudden check and start, and both for several minutes rode on silently. It was a relief when Sir James Clare, in his fussy, good-natured way, began to ramble about politics in his talk, and address himself to Lord Salford instead of his future son-in-law. A few rain-drops beginning to fall, the careful baronet suggested the propriety of returning home:—none the less earnestly perhaps, that he was as eager as a child to tell his good news to his wife at home.

The Marquis bowed and took his leave, his grave face one shade darker than before the

meeting with his old love. Maude, trembling for her coroneted schemes, saw him, with an angry, jealous feeling, turn in the way Mr Warburton and Miss Carey had taken, following them at a distance.

“But no, no, it cannot be,—it cannot be!” she said to herself: “he cannot marry her; because she is poor, and old. She is no longer the Annie Carey of the picture-gallery. He will never marry her; and he must marry:—what fitter than the Netherby and Talbot?”

Be not too sure, Maude! How do you know that, in the mind’s eye of that stately, disappointed man, his youth’s love is not clothed with more than her girlish beauty?—that the pale halo of her lasting love for him does not make her a very angel of loveliness, and a saint of truth?

I warrant me, proud, beautiful Maude Talbot, that in that pale, shadowy spirit of Netherby’s boy-love, you have a rival more powerful than you dare think!

## CHAPTER XI.

### AN ENTERTAINMENT.

MAUDE TALBOT was presented ; and from that day she entered heart and soul into the excitements and dissipations with which she was environed. Her beauty was in everybody's conversation. Great connexions of her family, who had forgotten her, old friends of her father's, rallied round her. The admiration of the Marquis of Salford was repeated in the eyes of every man she met. In short, she became the fashion. Her sister Lettice at Houghton wondered why Maude's letters were so brief and rare, and began to miss her very much.

Philip Warburton looked on in bitterness of heart, and fear and trembling, at his girl-love amidst crowds of butterfly worshippers ; and

a clear, well-defined hatred of the dark, middle-aged man who was always to be seen lingering about her, began to grow up in his mind.

Mrs Warburton, in her quiet boudoir alone, wept floods of angry tears, when she had been watching her idolized son's ill-concealed trouble after a meeting with Maude.

Lady Clare hugged herself in her self-satisfaction at the brilliant success of a young lady under her chaperonage.

Juliet, from the height of her dignity as an engaged woman, soon to be transformed into a wife, looked upon her with complacency.

Sara and Ada, finding her unapproachable, began to dislike her more, and to be more elaborately amiable to her.

Such was the position of affairs on the night of Lady Clare's great ball. All the preparations had come to a conclusion favourably and in time. Few of the invitations had found their receivers pre-engaged. Spite of her maternal anxiety, Lady Clare acknowledged to herself, that it was likely to turn out a most successful affair. New dresses of delicate fabrics and tints had been liberally supplied to

the girls, and even Maude Talbot had observed they were in good taste. They were one and all in a state of great felicity. This ball was to do wonders. Sara Clare thought it would be impossible for Mr Warburton to resist her attractions in her fresh pink crêpe, and during the time occupied in dressing her hair, she had mentally refurnished, in a style of surpassing elegance, all the principal rooms at the Manor; she was proceeding to decide on the respective merits of cream-coloured and bay ponies for her phaeton, when Ada tripped into the room, radiant in pale blue lisse and white roses, to see if she was ready. Sara descended reluctantly enough from her mental upholstery to talk to her sister, and admire her attire. The Clares always admired each other; which made up for other people's neglect.

“Have you seen Maude Talbot?” asked Ada, shaking out her flounces a little more.

“No; is she in the drawing-room already?” said Sara.

“Yes, with mama: Juliet is there too, and Linnet: make haste;” and Ada departed.

“Miss Talbot, ma'am, is a perfect picter to

look at," mildly observed Mason, who officiated as maid to Lady Clare and her eldest daughter.

"Oh!" ejaculated Sara, with a vinegar smile. "There, Mason, that will do; that waist sits perfectly." The Abigail secretly rubbed her hand, almost sprained with the difficult task of bringing the two sides of the waist together, and said it did. A few more touches to the ringlets, another shake or two to the ample skirt, and Miss Clare, with one final and triumphant glance at the tall figure reflected in her glass, swept out of the room.

She felt almost sick with envy when she saw Maude; who had never before looked so radiant, so lovely. The rich lace dress over white satin, and the profusion of her diamonds—unusual ornaments for most girls—made a *tout ensemble* perfectly dazzling. There was a proud light too in her eyes, and a soft glow on her cheek—a tremulous glow which seemed to flicker and waver with every thought, under the shadow of her gleaming golden hair. She was pacing the room backwards and forwards,

her head bent down, and smiling to herself as though at some happy thoughts. Sara looked at Maude until she began to feel quite wicked, and then she sat down by her mama, and began to depreciate her.

Amongst the earliest arrivals was old Mr Tempest, red, and more discomposed even than usual. After paying the customary compliments to the hostess, he immediately fastened on Maude Talbot; who, with Juliet Clare, was standing in a recess, listening to a brief sketch of each person, sufficiently notable either in name, appearance, or manner, to deserve the distinction. It was some time before the young ladies could disentangle from Mr Tempest's hazy stammering speech what he wished to convey.

"Where do you get your books of light reading from?" was his question.

"From Ferguson's library," answered Julia, smiling at the oddity of the question at such a time.

"Ah! that is right! his old father-in-law, Grassley, gives me books I am ashamed to put in my carriage to take home. Three volumes



of ‘Despairing Lovers,’ and ‘Desponding Hearts!’ Nauseous trash! What does a man of my age care if all the hearts in the kingdom are as fragile as the contents of a China closet. Hearts, indeed! Stuff and nonsense! I don’t believe in hearts!” And with an expression of face which might have been caused by the recent swallowing of a bitter draught, the irascible country squire went off to repeat the same question and same information to all his acquaintances in the room, who were not sufficiently fortunate to perceive his advance, and evade it.

By this time the fashionable crowd was fast increasing; the lively sounds of the band, and the tread of the dancers, came softened from the furthest room of the suite, which was the ball-room. Juliet had passed on with Lord Linnet to join the quadrille; but Maude, half-hidden by the draperies of a bay-window, still kept her place in the room. Several ladies had placed themselves near it, so she could, without being remarkable herself, observe every one who appeared.

When the Marquis of Salford entered, Lady

Clare had rather more than the usual amount of compliments to exchange with him. He listened to her deferentially, and then passed up the room without perceiving Maude in her retirement. This trifling circumstance might have mortified Miss Talbot, had she not, after the lapse of about ten minutes, seen the Marquis come back, looking about as if in search of some one. This time he saw her, and approaching with a quickened pace the recess in which she sat, asked why she had not joined the dancers in the ball-room.

“I am new yet to the scene and the people,” replied Maude; “so I ensconced myself in that quiet nook, that I might observe, unobserved.”

“That could not possibly continue long,” said the Marquis, bowing low, with a deferential air and a look of devotion which made Maude’s heart flutter.

“Miss Talbot has too many ambitious aspirants after her notice, for her to be left to the enjoyment of quiet in a ball-room. I do not dance myself: I am a mere looker-on at

gaieties from which I seceded years ago ; but perhaps you will allow me the honour of enlightening you as to the names of the little stars Lady Clare has gathered together to-night."

"Juliet has anticipated your kindness ; but you can tell me who is the singular old lady marching towards the saloon?" said Maude, smiling.

"I have the honour of calling that singular old lady, aunt : she is my father's sister," replied the Marquis : "will you permit me to introduce you ? Talbot is a favourite name of hers—one of the most honoured, and most honourable in history, she observed to me this morning."

Maude allowed herself to be led forward to where the Countess of Riversdale had subsided languidly into a seat, after listening to the compliments and enquiries of some half dozen elderly dowagers. Her nephew greeted her with a ceremonious and courtly air, and was received most graciously ; the old lady often thought in her own mind that he would not have disgraced the ranks of

the young men of her day, whose manners were so much superior to that cool, ungraceful, self-assurance which came in with rail-roads and steam-boats.

Maude instantly found favour in her eyes, and she was beckoned to a seat by her side—a mark of peculiar import: an acknowledgment of equality, in short, which the Countess of Riversdale rarely conceded to anybody beyond her own family circle.

“My dear, this is a strange crowd that Lady Clare has collected: except yourself and my nephew, I see scarcely a creature in my own set. Geoffry, what is that bustle at the door? who is coming in?” asked the old lady, raising her glass.

“It is Mr Warburton, with several other people whom I don’t remember,” replied the Marquis quietly. The party passed up the rooms by the place where Maude sat, and she then saw that it consisted of “Sweet Annie Carey,” Lady Lauderdale and her daughter, with several young men, strangers to her.

With an interest indescribable, Maude followed them with her eyes; she saw the Mar-

quis also glance after them ; he then, with a half-muttered excuse, sauntered off to a corner, and during the short time he remained in the room, his whole thoughts were engrossed with the vision of a faded woman in white brocade, who stood passive, and seemingly very much out of her element, in the midst of a rush of loquacious girls, amongst whom were Ada Clare and Cicely Dobbs.

Many times was Maude obliged to assume a deferential air of attention to the observations of Lady Riversdale, when her whole thoughts were rivetted upon that ill-assorted group. Except by a distant bow, Philip Warburton had not recognised her presence. He stood leaning over the back of the couch on which sat his cousin and Lady Lauderdale, with a *distract* and anxious face, occasionally joining in their conversation ; but after a while he was drawn away from that place, and Maude lost sight of him.

“ He might have taken the trouble to come to this side of the room to speak to me,” she thought to herself, as she saw him disappear amongst the gay crowd thronging the door-

way; and then something in her own heart whispered to her the double game she was playing, and with a very bitter pang she acknowledged to herself how very small an amount of happiness is derived from worldly gaiety, and how blank the merriest scene can be in the absence of the one individual in whom we feel an interest.

Lady Riversdale recalled her rebellious thoughts to less abstract considerations.

“My dear Miss Talbot, is it true that Juliet Clare is engaged to that boyish Lord Linnet?” asked she, as the pair sauntered past, arm in arm.

“Yes: do you not think them well matched?” said Maude, archly.

“Contrasted, but not matched: oh no! Juliet Clare must be many years older than he is—seven at least; and to my thinking the difference should be on the other side. I approve of very early marriages for women, but not so for men. After her first youth is past, a woman should never marry.”

“But Juliet Clare is young still,” suggested Maude.

“ Linnet is a child ! Such unions are preposterous : people laugh at them already. My grave nephew even is smiling down on them.”

Maude looked over to where the Marquis of Salford stood, and saw the half-supercilious air with which he was regarding the lover-like airs of the two. They did look somewhat absurd, certainly.

“ Miss Talbot, you do not dance ? I hope you have not made a vow against it,” said a voice close beside them. Maude turned and saw Philip Warburton.

The start and blush with which she received him, slight as they were, were sufficient to drive away from his face the expression which she had noticed but a short time before. He offered his arm to lead her into the ball-room, and she rose immediately, resigning her seat to an elderly dowager of Lady Riversdale’s acquaintance, who had been hovering about there for sometime in the hope of succeeding to Miss Talbot’s place.

“ That girl is the loveliest I have seen for ten seasons : ever since Annie Carey came

out," observed Lady Riversdale. "What a swan-like dignity and grace there is in her movements : she is superb."

"You are not alone in that opinion. Your nephew admires her excessively."

The Countess looked down on the presuming dowager with a very acid expression. What business had Lady Frowley to know who *her* nephew admired : he could not have spoken to her on the subject.

So there was division between the ancient ladies ; and internally each thought the other atrocious, whilst their "becks, and nods, and wreathed smiles," would have led all beholders to consider them as the best friends in the world.

And for a while Maude was happy. The Marquis of Salford was gone ; Philip Warburton had lost his constraint of manner, and she had quite forgotten the ambitious dreams of the nights before. The undisguised admiration which followed her movements had its share in contributing to her feeling of exhilaration. The world seemed to move on golden wheels, without a roughness on its path. If



Time would only have stood still! If he would have held his glass, and stayed the sands till she had calmly weighed the worth of the strong heart beside her, against the bubble opinion and the tinsel of rank:—if—if— Well, she had her chance on the tide of fortune; she disregarded the turn of it till it had ebbed away from her, leaving her stranded amidst wrecks: worn relics of her old dreams. It is only what thousands have done before her, what tens of thousands shall do again.

“What insanity—what folly I have been guilty of!” was her internal thought, as she threw herself wearily on the couch in her dressing-room after Aimée was dismissed for the night, the temporary feeling of excitement gone.

“I begin to despise myself for my vacillation. I verily believe my reason will prove traitor to my heart if I keep not strict watch.” And then a flood of bitter tears fell unrepressed, whilst her throbbing heart ached with the weight she forced it to bear.

There were few in that wide city, surround-

ed with poverty and misery in their direst shapes, who felt a wilder or more passionate anguish than that self-inflicted torment of Maude Talbot's.

## CHAPTER XII.

## THE BREAKING OF OLD TIES.

CYRUS EVELYN was a hardy man of his age, or he would scarcely have risen at five in the morning to walk to Staunton in the middle of July—a peculiarly hot July too ; but the old librarian would have made an effort to perform a greater feat than that of walking eight miles, for the object he had in view. Not that it was a pleasant object, by any means : far from it.

The woman at the lodge observed to her husband, who was setting out to his work in the gardens, that she had not seen “auld Muster Evlyn sae douncast for mony a day—niver sin’ maister died.” Indeed, as he trudged along the dusty high road, his heart grew heavier at every step. Generally there was

a degree of briskness in his gait that made him seem younger than he really was ; but on this particular morning his pace was feeble, and his clothes hung about him in an uncomfortable style, as if their owner had been too full of other thoughts, to adjust them with his usual nicety.

And so it was. Ties of kindred Cyrus Evelyn had none ; ties of friendship—but one remaining link of the chain of his youth : this one humble enough, but precious, as last relics of past times mostly are.

He was going to see old Mark Jefferson before he removed to the town, to which his affection for his son and the two children had brought him to consent.

Now, Jefferson had lived at Staunton when Cyrus Evelyn came to Houghton a young man. Jefferson had a sister—dead, and forgotten years ago, but by those two—and they never met without naming her, her beauty, her virtues, her excellence. That was the recollection and idea they had in common ; the sympathy that bound the abstruse scholar and the unlettered peasant. Both had loved her.

Taking his way slowly through the wood-paths which ran parallel with the road for some distance, Cyrus Evelyn remembered meeting her in that very place: he remembered her youth and freshness, which had gone down to the grave, unsullied, fifty years before. Now they had left him with nothing on earth dearer than his books, and her brother, to whom he could speak of her; and at last, he was going too: their rare meetings would become rarer still—perhaps would cease altogether; for the town was distant, and the old man, used all his life to the air of the hills, would soon droop in the crowded alleys, where their fortunes would compel them to live; as what furnished a decent maintenance in a quiet country place, would be little short of starvation in the city,—would be almost absorbed in the rent of their dwelling; rents being very high in the town.

These things had been talked over by the two old men at their last meeting, about a fortnight before. Jefferson acknowledged that he would rather be carried to the churchyard than to the town, but for the love he bore

the two girls. Them he could not give up to their father's half-negligent care.

The younger Jefferson had been told that a school was to be built in the village, and that therefore removal was unnecessary on his children's account; but as no visible preparations for the building were begun, and several weeks passed without the place being any more heard of, in a fit of passion, he vowed he would not depend on the charity or caprice of any lady in the land, but he would settle in the town and bring up the girls after his own fashion. Once the idea broached, there was no moving the obstinate man from his purpose; so the grandfather, with a foreboding and sorrowful heart, determined to go too.

As Cyrus Evelyn passed the church-yard, he saw his old friend going in at the gate. Jefferson's tall figure was more bent than usual, and he pressed heavily on his stick: he looked bowed down with trouble rather than years. He raised his head, and seeing Cyrus, beckoned him to join him, and the two sat down under the porch, in sight of the graves of the

family which Jefferson had come to visit for the last time.

"I never thought to see this day, friend Jefferson," said Cyrus, gently.

"It is as God wills:—most like it is for good," replied the other, devoutly. "It is not easy to leave these," pointing to the graves; "but surely, I say to myself, the living son is mair than the dead: anyhow, God has *them* in his keeping. There is no call for me to watch over *them* now, so I maun gang where I may be needed. Jessie maun't run wild, nor Nell either, poor lassies. I did hope to lay me doun here wi' wife and bairns, father and mother; but if so be I maun rest in some toun church-yard, why, I maun be content: and sure I shall, sine it be His will."

"You were born and bred here?" said Cyrus.

"Ay, and married too: there's nought I remember worth minding that did na fall out at Staunton. We—the Jeffersons I mean—hae lived on that bit of a farm for generations. I ken every stick and stone about the place; there isn't an auld man here, or an auld wo—

man either, I don't remember as young folks : it will be awful dowly in that great toun, where ane meets hundreds o' folk, and not ane to give you 'good-day.' There was a talk once of our Alice (you mind Alice?) going into sarvice there, before she took ill and died, poor bairn. Aye, she was bonnie ! I see nae lassies sae bonnie now-a-days, and few sae good ;—but the best always gang first : sure ar'nt they maist fit to be gathered in by God's reapers ? It's for mercy, surely, He reserves a late harvest for such as us. I hae been a hard man i' my day ; but thanks be to His everlasting goodness, He has given me time to repent. Ay, Mr Evelyn, sir,—"but there's much to be thankful for, if every thing doant fall out to our wish."

" Truly, Mark, there is : not one of your children has brought disgrace to your hearth," said Mr Evelyn.

" 'Deed, sir, and you are right ; I can hauld up my head wi' the best of 'em. Shame has not fallen on these grey hairs yet ;—please God it never may. He has scattered my bairns far an' wide,—some he has ta'en to himself ;



but He has kept the auld stock frae worse than death."

"Have you sold your bit of land as well as you expected?" asked Mr Evelyn.

"Better: but that was a breaking away that seemed a'most wicked. That signing away o' the bit house and croft seemed sae like forsaking ane's father and mother. Ay, ay, friend, but this is a sad day for Mark Jefferson: sadder than maist folk think for!"

As he spoke, the old man leant his head on his hand, and wept aloud. The paroxysm was soon over; and then he rose, and leaning on his stick, followed by Cyrus Evelyn, he went and stood a few minutes by the graves in silence. There was a prayer in both those hearts.

As they approached the cottage, there was a cart driven up by the younger Jefferson. The two girls were standing by the open gate watching the carrying away of their poor articles of household furniture, which had been purchased by the neighbours; all except the great eight-day clock, and a large chest con-

taining their clothing, and the family Bible ; these were to go the town with them.

The two old men went into the house, which was beginning to look empty, as thing after thing was fetched away by the new owners. The children, as was natural to their age, were more interested than grieved ; for the prospect of change was sufficient to soothe any feeling of sorrow they might have experienced at leaving their garden and their household pets. Jessie cried to take her dog and canary, but her father peremptorily refused ; and so they were consigned to the tender mercies of a little companion. Nellie had gathered together her few books, and other precious trifles, and made them into a neat parcel, which she kept secure under her arm from the moment she had made it up ; never quitting it for a moment, lest it should disappear, as every other familiar thing was doing. The two stood watching as their father, helped by another man, was putting the clock and chest into the cart ; some straw was then put in the bottom, and Jefferson said all was ready—it was no use waiting.

Several of the neighbours had gathered for the leave-taking, and with them Jefferson shook hands ; and then he lifted the two girls into the cart, Nellie still clinging to her books.

“The auld man is i’ th’ house wi’ Mister Evelyn ; mun I call him ?” asked the assistant.

“Ay, call him ! call him ; it is nigh eleven o’clock : let us begone,” said Richard Jefferson.

He came out immediately ; followed by Cyrus Evelyn ; and after exchanging a few hurried good-byes, they helped him into the cart, and moved off.

All down the village-street, as they went, the people came out to see them go ; women and children, and old men past work, who were Mark’s contemporaries. Jessie had begun to cry again—she was a tender-hearted little thing—at the sight of so many of her play-fellows, sad to see her go away : she was beginning to think who she should play with now, and to wonder whether Jane Lee would be kind to Frisk, and whether she would forget to feed Ally, and let him die in his cage. But Nell waved her hand, and shouted out good-bye ! good-bye ! as merrily as the best ;

and her father patted her on the back, and said she was the girl to go through the world bravely.

And the old man bore up amazingly—so the people said, at least ; and Cyrus Evelyn, as he lost sight of them at a turn in the road, felt rejoiced that his old friend had borne the separation so firmly, and trudged homewards more hopefully than he had come. Not all the way on foot, however ; for Mr Burr, in his gig, overtook him about a mile from Staunton, and gave him a ride to the lodge-gate : for even Mr Burr respected Cyrus Evelyn—less for his goodness probably than for his scholarship.

Miss Sedley and Lettice were walking in the gardens as Mr Evelyn came up from the Park. Flossy spied him first, and came bounding across the grass, and barking vociferously, to meet him ; Lettice and her governess turned too. Lettice looked with astonishment at the librarian's dusty garments, and asked him where he could have been so early to get himself in such a state of dust.

“ To Staunton, Miss Lettice,” replied Mr Evelyn.

"To Staunton!" echoed the little girl: "you walk to Staunton, Mr Evelyn!"

"Strange, but true," he replied, smiling. And now, would you like to know what took me so far on foot at this time of day?"

"Oh! yes I should; make it long: make a story of it; please do, Mr Evelyn!"

The old man complied, and gave her a description of the departure of the Jeffersons, with an amplitude of detail sufficient to satisfy even her appetite for stories. She was very grave and sad over it.

"Those must have been the two little girls who came here soon after Maude went to London. Were they sorry to go to the great ugly town?" she asked, when Mr Evelyn ceased speaking.

"No; they do not know what is before them. No doubt the town has seemed to their imagination a beautiful place. I heard Nelly telling her little sister that her father would make ladies of them, and they would have pretty frocks and new books much oftener than they had at Staunton. That would be a consolation perhaps. Poor motherless little things!"

“How sorry I am for them!” said Lettice, sadly. If Maude had been here they would not have gone perhaps: and that poor old man to be taken away from the place where he was born. How old did you say he was, Mr Evelyn?”

“Eighty-seven—too old, Miss Lettice, to take root in new soil,” replied the old man.

“Oh, yes! think of transplanting you! Why you are as much a part of the library as the books themselves. I verily believe those dear old creaking shoes of yours, if you carried them off to any other place, would be heard some fine day marching solemnly up the great staircase, and into the library by themselves. You may even haunt it if you like, Mr Evelyn: I should not be afraid of *your* ghost, even in the twilight. I am sure it would be a nice good-natured old ghost—quite different from the common ones.”

“I hope it would, Miss Lettice, especially to you; but younger spirits would make it more lightsome, I think,” replied the old man.

“You are not thinking of making me a

spirit, Mr Evelyn?" exclaimed Lettice, with a glance of pretended alarm.

"God forbid!" ejaculated Mr Evelyn, standing still and gazing down on the bright face up-turned towards his: "God forbid!" He could say no more, but kept repeating his exclamation half reflectively to himself, as if he were pondering in his mind on some intrusive idea that would not be put aside, and which that look on the child's face had awakened.

"No; on the whole the world seems a very merry place—a very happy place: and Mr Evelyn, Maude is coming home!" said Lettice.

"Eh! what? coming home! That is good news to you, little friend!" replied Cyrus.

"It seems months since she went away. She is coming on Thursday: only two days to wait. There was a letter this morning—oh! such a good letter! She did think of going abroad with some old Lady Riversdale, but she changed her mind for her little Lettice: that's me! Dear Maude, how happy I am! Oh! Miss Sedley, you must not expect any

proper lessons for a week,—my head has not room for so much at once.”

Miss Sedley promised not to indulge in any expectations which would be sure to meet with disappointment.

“All these bright, long summer days I have so wished for her,” continued Lettice; “nobody but myself knows how wearily; and at last she is coming: she shall never, never, leave me again! Miss Sedley, do you never wish you had a sister?”

“No, Lettice, I am content,” replied Miriam, quietly.

“Content,” said Lettice, musingly; “content; are you content, Mr Evelyn?”

“Yes, yes, I may say I am very content,” returned Cyrus.

“What is the difference between content and happy? I think I know: but it is hard to be content, is it not? I could not be content if I were alone, as you are both. I could not be content without Maude: it would not be enough for me to know that there is a future better than this present time, if the present were without some one to love and look to.”



“Not now, Lettice. Young hearts ask much : but there is—you know there is—a love stronger, purer, better than any human affection. To that love we all come at last !” said Miss Sedley.

“And it never fails us, Lettice,” continued Cyrus Evelyn : “take an old man’s word for it, whose life, but for that all-sustaining, untiring love, would have been a blank or blotted page. No sorrow so deep but that love can heal it ; no sin so great but that love can pardon. Child, you may put all your trust in the affection of creatures like yourself—you may be good, and self-denying, and faithful, yet your trust may come to nought ! There is but God’s love that stands firm against the shocks of adverse fortune, and that will stand you in good stead to the day of death ; for His love has not in it the seeds of death like that of mortals ! Seek it, child ! seek it ! the day may come that has no light but the reflection of that heavenly tenderness.”

“Now, let us go in.”

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